THE VETERAN

Vietnam Veterans Against the War

Volume 41, Number 1 Spring 2011

Listen to Veterans

Di Wood

Madison, WI – All the players were there – the inspired masses and clever signs; casual, dressed-down politicians – a friendly, slightly older crowd of about 30,000, expressing solidarity with America's workers and angst over the 8th anniversary of America's involvement in Iraq. It was a happening, albeit on a smaller scale than previous weekends in Madison, that shouted: "Pay attention, America! Our labor problems are your labor problems. They will soon be your problems, too."

Like other recent protests, Madison on March 19, 2011 was amiable and well-orchestrated, a colorful banding together of like-minded souls for a unified "fight" over labor and occupation issues. Well worth the time, over-stimulation and sore feet in camaraderie alone, was it more than a cathartic and meaningful preaching to the choir? The well-intentioned mayor and labor leaders led shout-outs; the dynamic African American fire chief chanted with the crowd and made a joke about how all firefighters look alike. An organized group of grandmothers entertained and educated the crowd with humor and song. They were there in good numbers, giving selflessly what they could of their time and spirit. Did the innate spectacle elevate the day to the highest form of reality theater or something more significant and promising leading to change?

As a near elder, this question kept rising in me. Where was the debate, the dialogue, the opposition, the opportunity to take it to a higher level? Was the middle-aged woman frowning down on us from the second floor Capitol window the only opposition Madison could muster? Were her multiple, futile attempts to close the office curtains the only expression of a possible alternative opinion in the crowd? Will all this heart and effort lead to real change? Who will we inspire but ourselves if no one from "the other side" shows up? Is America so polarized and/or lethargic these days that we end up protesting in a vacuum?

IVAW at Wisconsin State Capitol, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

What fruits will the day bring to veterans, firefighters, teachers and people of war-torn nations? What did we teach the world about the issues that we didn't already know? Was it good enough to just show up and speak our truth to power if no "power" bothered to show up and listen? Do we have only our numbers and the mainstream media (which was barely present) to carry the message forward?

From the earliest days of the Vietnam War, the presence and commitment of veterans protesting the very wars they had just returned from fighting left me, a member of the crowd, near frantic with grief and inspiration. Forty years ago, when the media observed the efficacy and power of soldiers and Marines protesting

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DC After Action Report

Bill Homans

On Thursday, March 17, Army Iraq vet Zach Choate and Coast Guard vet Ethan Crowell (who served in SE Asia) drove up from Baton Rouge, after Zach had picked Ethan up in Mobile. We took off from Clarksdale. We hammered it in about 16 hours, 955 miles, getting into Washington early into the afternoon. After a few misdirections by our GPS, we pulled into the Harrington Hotel. As soon as we got into a room, it was time to go to the big music-and-briefing meeting at the coffee/internet bar, Busboys and Poets.

I was able to give people an inspiring moment when movement musician and band-leader-for-the-night, Margaret Flowers, brought me to the stage to sing my song, "Blues for Howard" about Howard Zinn, with the band, that had actually practiced it!

I assured them that the spirit of my dear comrade Howard was with us all, just as it was in the last communication Howard ever sent me. In that letter, Howard Zinn sent me $1,000 and told me to do what was best with it. I gave it to IVAW toward the WSI in Austin. After some other magical, if rough, musical moments with the band over the duration of the meeting, I finished the show with Sweet Home Chicago (honest, it was on their set list!). Tip o the hat to y'all up in National.

In the morning, after a good breakfast served by sympathetic people, it was off to the site, where everyone busied themselves about all the things that are required for a good demonstration. Stage erection, literature ready, PA system there and working on time (as a musician, I'll tell you that one's real important), tables set in place. It is the same in the movement as it is in the music-festival business: the movement culture sustains itself through volunteers and volunteerism.

The speeches of Daniel Ellsberg, Chris Hedges, Ralph Nader and probably Ann Wright are all on You Tube now, so I won't summarize them. My remarks, representing VVAW, on the morning of Saturday, March 19, were short, and directed to President Obama.

I noted at the beginning that the President was not currently there and listening, but urged whoever was listening to take notice. I declared that several things having to do with the wars in Afghanistan (and Iraq, whether

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From the National Office

Barry Romo

We live in surprising times. Who would have thought that the Labor Movement would have been reborn in 2011.

The prior elections promised more of a turn to the right, a far right turn. The tea baggers thought they were the only movement in this country. But Madison, then Indianapolis, Ohio, the whole mid-west, Los Angeles and more showed the strength of the Unions, Labor and their allies. Not a flash in the pan, it has sustained and expanded.

VVAW and IVAW participated as individuals and as organizations; Vincent (IVAW) even led 30,000 in the Pledge of Allegiance in Indianapolis. IVAW and VVAW led 10,000 in Madison on March 19.

It is imperative now for us to hook up even closer with the labor movement.

My dad told me as I was growing up to belong to the union where ever I worked. He had joined the Meat Cutters in 1927 (a union that allowed Mexican-Americans in) went on strike during the depression and belonged until his death. I belonged to many unions, but spent 32 years in the Mail Handlers Union (31 as a Steward, Chief Steward and president) at the Post Office. I wish he lived to see this year.

This year marks the 50th Anniversary of the US using Agent Orange and other defoliants in Vietnam. Vietnamese are still being poisoned, children born with defects. The war ended but the Vietnamese and Americans continue to suffer. It is important that we continue to bring this up. 50 years later, lets finally end the war!

VVAW Security Force for IVAW Rally in Madison, Wisconsin. Photo by Andie Wood.

Barry Romo is a national coordinator of VVAW.

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Fraggin'

Bill Shunas

The Wife has a complaint. (Nothing new there.) It seems that certain people have stolen her party. They call themselves the Tea Party. If nothing else, The Wife is a tea drinker. Whether it be chamomile, seven spice Chai, French vanilla, cinnamon apple spice, sweet coconut Thai or plain old Lipton's or Tetley's, she is ready to party. She mixes two or three kinds together in a large pot which stays on the stove top all day long. These Tea Party people probably don't even drink tea.

Couldn't they have called themselves the Know Nothing Party like their 19th century forerunners? At least that's more descriptive. Michelle Bachmann seems to be one of their main spokespeople, and she obviously don't know nothin'. She's the one who said the "3/5s of a person" Founding Fathers were anti-slavery. And then she gave this speech in New Hampshire talking about the New Hampshire Revolutionary War heritage at Lexington and Concord which happen to be located in nearby Massachusetts. Hey, who am I to bicker with a know-nothing who confuses facts.

These Tea Partiers are proud of themselves. They hold up their shining example of Ronald Reagan, and if there ever was a president who could confuse facts it was the Gipper.

And now Bachmann is following in his footsteps. Maybe there is some method to their misstatement. It might be that Massachusetts is a blue state, and they want to excise it from Revolutionary War history. Only problem is that Massachusetts is where they had the original Tea Party. They should take the name Know Nothing or maybe Whatareyousmoking.com.

This is not a good year for world leaders. Silvio Berlusconi in Italy is in trouble for dallying with a 17-year-old and paying some others for sex. Paying? Didn't he learn anything at World Leader School? He should have paid to hear one of Bill Clinton's high-priced speeches. From no less than Newt Gingrich we receive understanding how these politicians get mixed up with these young babes. Wannabe world leader Newt recently admitted that his love for his country is what caused him to cheat on wife #2. Imagine him tip-toeing through the door at 4 AM, and she wakes and catches him. Says Newt, "My country was calling."

This year is shaping up to be one of those historic years where everything is in play. In addition to Berlusconi, the prime ministers of Portugal and Canada were tossed out due to budget crises. And most important of all, you've got all these dictators in the Middle East on shaky ground. Mubarak is gone after thirty years in power. Tunisian Ben Ali is gone after 23 years. Gadhafi might hang around for awhile, but he might only have half a country.

I write this long before you will be reading it which means that things will have developed further in various Middle Eastern countries. Hopefully we haven't invaded Libya.

In February and March we saw Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at several press conferences/ speeches making statements about one or the other Middle Eastern country undergoing protests, uprisings or revolution. Usually Hillary was verbally supportive of the rights of the protesters - except when a man wearing a Vets For Peace t-shirt staged a silent protest while she was speaking in favor of the right to protest. He kind of got manhandled a little bit. This might seem odd, but you have to understand the difference. Here we don't have dictators so this kind of protest is unacceptable.

I had a dream about Hillary. In the dream Hillary was standing on a balcony overlooking masses of people who were standing on a giant map of the Middle East. They were broken down into groups with each group standing on the part of the map that corresponded to their country. Every now and then Hillary would point down at one of the groups. "Bahrain," she would say. "Good dictator. Just be nice y'all." Then she'd point over at North Africa. "Libya. Bad dictator. Lockerbie bomber. Rise up people."

In between pronouncements she would step back into the shadows of the balcony and confer with figures who looked somewhat like Barack Obama, Joe Biden, Robert Gates and her former husband - excuse me - the former president. Then, back in the light. "Iran. Bad dictator. Power to the people." Then she spotted the bright lights of Saudi Arabia and clapped her hands. "Good dictator. Our rock in the region."

Yemen's leader received plaudits for helping fight Al Qaeda despite the unrest of his people. Likewise Jordan and Iraq received praise, but then she pointed at Syria with an upturned nose and a down turned thumb. And so went the dreams, leaving me with a restless night.

Supporting dictators is hard work. You've got to keep them from being too hard on their people, or at least pretend that you do. You've got to keep the people from thoughts of overthrow. It's not easy being State Department. Or Defense. If an individual wishes to advance a State Department career they need to qualify at the dictator support classes given by some of the finest minds in the country.

One person who broke the rules on dictator support was Defense Secretary Gates. A couple of months ago he made a speech at West Point suggesting that any Secretary of Defense who advised a president to partake of a land war in Asia or the Middle East was out of his mind. This explains a lot. Flash back to the Reagan era. He cut spending for mental health, and that meant many of the mentally ill lost their bed in the institution. And that's about the time future Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld emerged into the spotlight. See the connection? I don't know the explanation for McNamara, but he and Rummy have a lot in common.

What's that place over in Asia? The one where we just destroyed a village in order to save it? They say we've been having collateral damage there. But at least our body count is better than theirs. And those people don't care about life. Why, according to the number one general, some of that collateral damage really was the result of parents burning their children to receive compensation from the naive do-gooders at the State Department.

Seldom can you say this about a Defense Secretary, but Secretary Gates was right. We shouldn't get involved in a land war in Asia. Strange bird that Gates. Must have missed the dictator support class. He'll never pass Tea Party muster.

Bill Shunas is a Vietnam veteran, author and VVAW member in the Chicago chapter.

What is VVAW's Military and Veterans Counseling Doing Now?

Ray Parrish

We reach out to and serve veterans with PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) or TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) so severe that they end up with less-than-honorable military discharges due to misconduct or veterans who were discharged for pre-existing mental disorders. Both are ways for the government to avoid treating or compensating them. Many veterans reject the VA as part of the government that they blame for their distress. We do this work nationally via phone, mail or internet and locally through referrals from various governmental and private social service agencies, shelters and visiting nursing homes and senior citizen centers and word of mouth. With the objective of helping veterans recover through treatment, we provide them with the psychological evaluations and legal representation needed to win VA disability claims and cases before the BCMR (Board for the Correction of Military Records) or the DRB (Discharge Review Boards) for discharge upgrade or medical retirement.

Eight years ago VVAW hired me to answer a hotline 24/7 as the Director of our Military and Veterans Counseling Service. I didn't realize how overloaded this service was until the crisis calls began declining when the feds opened up the suicide hotline. It was about then, three years ago, that we could afford to hire Johanna (Hans) Buwalda as our therapist. We became the only veterans group employing a therapist. Hans is running peer groups for

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Notes From the Boonies

Paul Wisovaty

Every six months, Joe Miller e-mails me with a reminder that my next *Veteran* column is due. I then call him and say, "Joe, I got nothin' man. I'm drawin' a blank." He reassuringly, if not confidently, replies, "It's OK, Paul. You'll think of something." Longtime *Veteran* readers will understand that he is occasionally correct. So here's what I got as we enter into our ninth year in Iraq and tenth year in Afghanistan.

I was watching a network news show about a week ago, and the anchor moved into the "in other news of the day" category. The news magazine, *The Week*, labels this category "boring but important." Pretty much the same thing: there's no March Madness news tonight, but we have to fill the time slot with something.

In that other news of the day, Gallup reported that 65% of Americans believe that we have no legitimate reason to be in Afghanistan and should pull our troops out as soon as possible. The anchor immediately moved on to a shocking story that scientists have discovered a rare butterfly species thriving in a country I have never heard of. A five minute interview with a respected entomologist followed. My eyes were glazing over.

I do not recall exactly when anti-Vietnam sentiment hit 65%, but my guess is that by that time there was serious shit taking place on campuses and in cities in this country. In 2011, we have almost two thirds of Americans telling Gallup that this Bush-inspired and Obama-perpetuated fiasco is just that and, at the slim risk of overstatement, nobody seems to care. I was informed in mid-March that some serious anti-war demonstrations were planned for Washington and other major cities for March 19, and when I picked up the Champaign, Illinois *News-Gazette* on March 20 I found nothing. (OK, the Champaign paper decorates its front page with cute little tea bag images. This may not have been a reliable source.)

I'm guessing that we lose about 30-40 men and women in the Mideast every month, maybe a few more. In Vietnam, we were losing well over a hundred a week by 1968. That is certainly a big difference. Unless, of course, those 30-40 Americans are your child, parent, spouse or sibling. So I guess it's all about the numbers. Or maybe it's about the fact that middle class white kids don't get drafted when they are graduated from college. Or maybe that our taxes aren't going up to pay for these wars. Hey, nobody died and made me a sociology professor. But the bottom line seems to be this: this year's NCAA basketball tournament rates a lot higher on most Americans' radar screens than the longest and one of the least popular wars which this country has ever fought.

Enjoy your Memorial Day.

Paul Wisovaty is a member of VVAW. He lives in Tuscola, Illinois, where he works as a probation officer. He was in Vietnam with the US Army 9th Division in 1968.

Veterans from the Clarence Fitch Chapter of VVAW, IVAW-NYC, four local chapters of VFP, and IVAW, joined by the Friends and Family of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, US Labor Against the War, and Code Pink, marched up 5th Avenue to much applause from the crowd. The contingent was organized by VFP-NYC Chapter 34. (l-r) Mike Gold, Bill Johnsen, George Weber, Hugh Bruce, Michael Hayes, Ken Dalton, Susan Schnall. Photo by Ben Chitty.

VVAW's Military and Veterans Counseling

men and women veterans and family/friends on top of individual counseling for both treatment and evaluation purposes. Two years ago a Prisoners' Rights Coalition newsletter had an article about the work we do and letters from incarcerated vets began pouring in to the office. Six months later I began training three women, non-veteran volunteers in VA claims and discharge upgrading; Libby Frank, Dedra White-Montgomery and Karen Siegel. They've now passed the VA tests and are accredited VA Claims Agents.

These volunteers are each putting in 10-20 hours a week and we're finally able to begin to address the backlog of cases. If we can find the funding to pay them full-time, I won't feel guilty about taking advantage of their time and acquired skills and we can do more outreach without hesitation. We are discovering that veterans face a multitude of problems in prison and nursing homes. We're finding and fighting abuse and neglect in both populations. Both are full of vets with bad discharges, PTSD, TBI and/or Agent Orange diseases and they didn't know there was help for them until they heard of us. A year ago Hans began training other mental health professionals in how to write the evaluations needed to win these VA disability and discharge upgrade claims. She is now doing this nationally with volunteers from the Soldiers Project.

You can reach us all at our office at 3411 W. Diversey, Chicago IL 60647, telephone number 773-697-8872. You can use vetshelp@vvaw.org to contact Libby, Dedra and Karen. Hans can be reached at vetcounseling@vvaw.org. I'm still answering the hotline at 773-561-8829 and reachable at camiblue@vvaw.org. I'm still doing our live, call-in TV show on Chicago cable, with past episodes at veteranshelpingveterans.us.

Ray Parrish is the Benefits Director at VVAW's Military and Veterans Counseling Service.

Marking 50 Years of Agent Orange in Vietnam: The Struggle for Justice Moves Forward

Merle Ratner

2011 is the 50th anniversary of the US government's use of the chemical weapon – Agent Orange – against the Vietnamese people. In 1961 as part of the US's escalating war of counter-insurgency, the military began to spray Agent Orange throughout southern Vietnam. Dubbed Operation Ranch Hand, the use of toxic chemicals was the beginning of a ten year period of poisoning not only the people and land of Vietnam but also the US and allied soldiers sent to fight in the war.

The Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/ Dioxin(VAVA), the representative of Vietnam's Agent Orange victims, is holding a year of activities to highlight the struggle for justice for Vietnamese and all Agent Orange victims. A conference focusing on the hearing the voices of first, second and third generation Agent Orange victims from Vietnam, the US, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and Canada will be held in August.

The Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign (VAORRC) will be participating in these activities to mark the 50th year. Fifty years is too long for the victims of Agent Orange to be denied justice and compensation! The US government and the chemical manufacturers responsible for the horrific health and environmental consequences of Agent Orange must heed international public opinion and do the right thing!

US Congressional legislation to provide comprehensive assistance to Vietnam's Agent Orange victims, clean up the toxic "hot spots" in Vietnam and provide medical care for US veterans' children and Vietnamese Americans affected by Agent Orange, is in the final stages of drafting and is expected to be introduced this year.

VAORRC is building a national network of veterans, Vietnamese Americans, environmental, public health, peace activists and others. Expressing public sentiment that fifty years is already too long to wait for justice for Agent Orange victims, this network will educate our communities and elected representatives as well as hosting delegations of Agent Orange victims from Vietnam.

Working with the Bhopal network and other environmental organizations, VAORRC is continuing to shine a light on the attempts of Agent Orange manufacturers Dow and Monsanto to greenwash their reputations. Both companies try to portray themselves as socially responsible even as they refuse to assist the victims of their toxic chemicals. Last year we were there to confront Dow at its Live Earth Run for Clean Water and we will be there whenever dirty Dow raises its head!

In November, VAORRC hosted a delegation from our sister organization, the Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange/Dioxin. Headed by VAVA President Nguyen Van Rinh and including Agent Orange victim Dang Hong Nhut, the delegation traveled to San Francisco, New York and Washington DC and met with congress members, church leaders, scientists, public health experts, veterans, Vietnamese American leaders and others.

The VAVA delegation had a strategy meeting with VAORRC core and board activists including VVAW National Coordinators Barry Romo and Marty Webster.

In the Bay Area of California, the delegation took part in a traditional family Thanksgiving dinner and joined thousands of people at a Native American Sunrise Ceremony at Alcatraz Island. Building solidarity with the indigenous people of the Americas, the delegation was able to appreciate the history and culture of native nations. The host of the Ceremony, Mary Jean Robertson, a member of the Cherokee Nation, said she hopes the US government will do something about the Agent Orange dropped on the Vietnamese people.

The response to the visit of the VAVA delegation was quite positive with people in each city volunteering to work with VAORRC.

2011 is an auspicious year for making great progress in achieving justice for Agent Orange victims in Vietnam and in the US! Meeting the human needs of our sisters and brothers who bear the scars of Agent Orange on their bodies is urgent. And, it is imperative that the US government know that using chemical warfare, whether in Vietnam, in Iraq or Afghanistan, invokes responsibility to the victims of these weapons of mass destruction.

VVAW National Coordinators Barry Romo and Marty Webster are VAORRC board members. Marty is also on the VAORRC core organizing committee

Merle Ratner is co-coordinator of the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief & Responsibility Campaign.

Barry and Marty with VAVA.

"Trying to Find My Way Home" by Jason Moon

JOHN ZUTZ (REVIEWER)

The latest CD by Iraq Veteran Jason Moon, "Trying to Find My Way Home," is a musical record of his battle with PTSD and his ongoing difficulty relating to society. Though his problems were caused by his combat experiences, Moon barely mentions those experiences and dwells on the results. Confronting his demons in his songs, he uses his folk style to become the Iraq Veteran Everyman, a troubadour spreading the message that PTSD sufferers are not alone. Along the way, he tries to assist others suffering from the problems encountered by returning veterans - alienation, depression, alcohol, drugs, suicide, and guilt among others.

The title track is probably Moon's strongest work, a lament that communicates the loss of innocence caused by combat, and the realization that it will never return. "How do they expect a man to do the things that I have, then come back and be the same?" It has the ring of honesty as it explores feelings of loneliness and alienation, as well as suicidal thoughts, and the struggle to overcome them. "Lately its occurred to me it's hard to fight an enemy that lives inside of your head." The string backup reinforces the mournful tone.

Strangely, on some of the cuts, the words don't seem to go with the music. In "Falling Off the Wagon," the battle with alcohol is documented in a joyful romp. "Sparkler" explores the sad feelings of a parent when leaving for a combat zone using an upbeat tune. "Happy to be Home" sets words of joy in a melancholy tune, which questions the sincerity of the verse.

The woozy feeling of "Love, Joy and Medication" reinforces the comments on the treatment for PTSD. While "Hold On" urges sufferers on for one more day, recalling twelve step programs. "Alone With Me Tonight," comments on the loneliness of separation from family and friends. "The War is Over" recalls a relationship splitting up, and the healing process beginning.

"The Best of Me" laments the loss of youth and the discovery that the real world is different from what is taught in school. "Another Day Like This" shows the determination to overcome the feelings of depression and alienation. "A New Song" exposes Moon's life and struggles, and ends on a hopeful note.

Moon writes from the heart,

and from the gut. He's been wounded in combat, and this album is a call for help and a prayer for healing – for himself and for his buddies.

"Trying to Find My Way Home" is available, along with Moon's other works, at http://www.jasonmoon.org

JOHN ZUTZ IS A MEMBER OF THE MILWAUKEE VVAW CHAPTER.

Bringing Vincent Home

JIM BALDRIDGE (REVIEWER)

Bringing Vincent Home
Madeleine Mysko
(Plain View Press, 2007
www.plainviewpress.net)

Madeleine Mysko's experience and perspective as an Army nurse during the Vietnam War in the burn ward at the Brooke Army Medical Center at Ft. Sam Houston in San Antonio gives her novel an autobiographical tone.

Kitty Duvall, the main character,is the mother of Vincent Duvall, "Vinnie", who was seriously burned when the helicopter in which he was riding was shot down. When she got word from the DoD that her son was wounded and was in the burn ward at Brooke, Kitty left her comfortable, insular existence in a northeast Baltimore home (on a street which actually exists, but on the southwest side of Baltimore) to rush to her son's side, leaving her anti-war activist daughter, Mary Kate, and oldest son, Jack, behind. She entered the terrible world of agony and death that define a war-time burn ward staffed by dedicated clinicians who strain to meet the difficult needs of survival, or the end of life, of young victims of war, as she searches for stability in the turmoil of her own life. Her Catholic beliefs won't permit her to be rid of her abusive (read WWII PTSD) husband who was absent during much of her children's upbringing.

We read novels or non-fiction and feel them based on our own experiences from that time. Before I enlisted I lost a high school chum who went into the Army's Warrant Officer program so he could be trained as a helicopter pilot; he was shot down and killed. The kid on whose little bicycle I learned to ride was an Army sniper in Vietnam; years later his mother's description to me of his "1,000 yard stare" is born out in Mysko's writing and the writing of others of our generation.

Bringing Vincent Home is an excellent read, and I am pleased to be able to say that Madeleine Mysko is a friend of mine, an anti-war veteran and member of the Baltimore chapters of VFP and VVAW.

Madeleine teaches writing in the Advanced Academic Programs of The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland and is also a published poet.

"Though a novel, *Bringing Vincent Home* reads like the finest memoir, so authentic and convincing that at times I found myself turning back to the title page to be sure it was a work of fiction. Rarely does a book of any sort touch me as this one did. Madeleine Mysko has created a vivid, beautifully written, and deeply personal piece of literature."

– Tim O'Brien, author, *The Things They Carried*, and *Going After Cacciato* (National Book Award Winner).

JIM BALDRIDGE IS A VIETNAM-ERA VETERAN, THE BALTIMORE CONTACT FOR VVAW AND A LIFE-MEMBER OF VFP. HE WAS STATIONED AT NORFOLK NAVAL AIR STATION, PAX RIVER NAS AND AT KEFLAVIK NATO BASE IN ICELAND. IN 1969 HE PRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED AN "UNDERGROUND ANTIWAR NEWSLETTER" WHILE DEPLOYED.

About 1,000 of our brothers and sisters showed up on the Utah capital steps to show support for Wisconsin and Ohio in the We Are One Rally. Photo by Aaron Davis.

My Dad and Me: Two Veterans Learning to Reach Across the Years

Joe Miller

There is now a folded flag on prominent display at my mother's home.

My dad passed away on October 14, 2010. Joseph Ignatius Miller (formerly Michalski) was born in Chicago on May 3, 1916. He was my hero, and I want to reflect on our relationship, especially as we approach what would have been his 95th birthday. First, some background.

Dad loved baseball, and the Chicago Cubs wanted him to join their farm team in 1935, when he was nineteen. That never happened; his father wanted him to get a "real" job. So, he worked as a box maker at the Western Electric factory in Cicero, Illinois for nearly forty years. However, there was an important break in his work life when Uncle Sam drafted him into the Army in early 1944. His military experiences were to affect him the rest of his life (as we veterans all know), though he never really opened up about it all until much later in life, and even then, hesitantly and piecemeal.

As a twenty-seven-year-old family man, he was called up at the height of the war. Mom and I moved to Janesville, Wisconsin, to live with her aunt and uncle. They took care of me while Mom went to work in a local defense plant.

Dad was assigned to the 106th Division, 424th Regiment, Company "G" as an infantryman. By November 1944, he was on a troop ship headed for England, where his unit received further training before going on to France. The 106th crossed into Belgium in early December and was sent to the Ardennes just before the German offensive. This is where all hell broke loose for this green and untested unit. Nothing major was supposed to happen! When Dad talked about this in later years, he marveled at how little the "higher-ups" seemed to know. He always suspected they knew more than they let on.

He was also dismissive of documentaries about the Battle of the Bulge because they could never reflect what he actually experienced in the confusion and fear of those early days.

Dad was taken from the battlefield with shell shock. He was sent to a field hospital, then a hospital in Liege, Belgium, a hospital in Paris, and finally, a hospital in Norwich, England. There he received shock treatments and insulin shots for the shell shock. Many years later, when he was interviewed by my sister, he told her he could not remember anything from the ten days of shock treatments. He was sent back to the States in July, 1945.

Finally, at Buckley Field in Colorado he was examined for his shell shock. It was determined he would not be sent to the Pacific because of this, and he was eventually given a medical discharge in October 1945, along with the Bronze Star. He was granted 10% disability, about $75.00 a month for the rest of his life. This was later rescinded after some people at Western Electric complained about him receiving disability payments while working full-time — how would this be dealt with today?

Now, growing up, I was told about the missed chance to play for the Cubs, the struggles with the bosses at Western Electric over union issues. And, I had vague memories about living in Janesville when I was two or three. But, I was never told about Dad's military experiences. All I knew was that he had been in the Army during the war. There was some vague reference to his unit having been "lost" in the war, but nothing more that this. In fact, he was not a big talker. He always had a quiet intensity about him.

Even when I decided to enlist in the Navy in 1961, a year after high school, Dad never took me aside to talk about what the military was like. I'm guessing he felt that the Navy was safe; if I had joined the Army, he might have seen a need to tell me more. It seems he had little fear or concern about me in the service until I was to be sent overseas.

I completed language training in Chinese in 1963, and I was ordered to Taiwan for duty with the Naval Security Group. After a period of leave at home, the day came for my departure from O'Hare Airport to San Francisco, where I would await travel arrangements at Treasure Island. My mom, dad and sister came to the airport to see me off. Mom was upset about my leaving, but that was expected. When it came time to shake my dad's hand and say goodbye, I was shocked to see tears coming down his face! Up to that point I had never seen that kind of emotion from my father; it wasn't like I was going to a war zone. He did not say anything, of course. It was the beginning of a new relationship with my dad, as if I had walked through a door that allowed us to know each other a little better.

We wrote to each other, and there was the occasional phone call when I needed help with one thing or another. We could even talk about politics in a way we never could before. I told him I planned to cast my first vote (absentee, since we were still in Westpac) for Goldwater in '64, since I just could not vote for LBJ after the Tonkin Gulf lies. My dad, lifelong union member and Polish-Catholic Democrat, let me know he did not think it was a good idea, but he left it at that. He allowed me to grow.

Later, when I got out of the Navy in early 1968, I jumped right into the anti-war movement. My Taiwanese wife (and sometimes our daughter Lisa) joined me in almost every Chicago demonstration. Dad never opposed these activities; he just thought they would never get any result. That late spring of 1968, he and I were Bobby Kennedy supporters. When Kennedy was murdered, we were both devastated. That year my dad voted for Richard Nixon. I wrote in Dick Gregory.

Over the past thirty-five years, my dad voted Republican and became a fan of Rush Limbaugh. Our discussions about politics got more heated, and we both learned to stay away from that subject for the most part.

We could talk about veteran issues and our various war experiences, however. He respected my work with VVAW and welcomed my comrades into his home. As we talked in recent years, one could see the continuing effects of his wartime experiences. He would stare off into space and reveal just a little more in a throwaway comment. He would talk about how rough medics had it, or make a cryptic reference to German prisoners of war who never made it to the rear area. The war never left him.

On a final note, though Mom and Dad had not voted in recent elections, when my father passed away last year, there was a large color photograph in a prominent place on his dresser: Barack and Michelle Obama at the 2009 Inaugural Ball.

Joe's parents' 69th wedding anniversary in 2009.

Joe Miller is a VVAW national coordinator

Sacrifice

Charley Trujillo

Memorial Day is a holiday that, apart from being a great weekend of shopping sales, commemorates US military war dead. Invariably, political speeches and writings by politicians, media editorials and commentaries will say, in one form or another, "…for those who sacrificed their lives for freedom and democracy." However abhorrent the idea of human sacrifice is to the Western mind it is historically common in many cultures. For example, most Western historians and anthropologist claim that the Aztecs (Mexicas) practiced human sacrifice. Academics have written that on one sacrificial binge 100,000 people were sacrificed. For one, this would be logistically impossible given the technology of the time and the supposed ceremonial manner in which the honored victims were dispatched. However, many indigenous elders assert that human sacrifice by the Aztecs is a pernicious fabrication used as an ideological tool to discredit and suppress indigenous people and culture.

Let us suppose that the Aztecs did practice human sacrifice as Western academics claim. One of the principal deities of the Aztecs was Huitzilopochtli the god of war and the sun. Huitzilopochtli required that someone be sacrificed everyday or else the sun would not rise. Legend has it that when the Aztecs were living in Aztlan – that some think was somewhere in the present-day Southwest—a high priest had a vision that Huitzilopochtli commanded that it was their manifest destiny to leave and settle in a place where they saw an eagle perched upon a cactus devouring a serpent. After years of wandering, they witnessed such an event in the middle of lake Texcoco in what is now Mexico City. Hence the iconic symbol on the Mexican flag of an eagle devouring a serpent.

The Aztecs were militaristic and aggressive. Within a hundred years of founding their capitol Tenochtitlan, it became the most powerful city-state in the valley of Mexico. They kept expanding their influence from sea to shining sea until the Spanish arrived in central Mexico in 1519 and eventually overthrew them.

Just as the Aztecs did, the United States also believed that a deity ordained them exceptional. They believed that it was their manifest destiny to spread the ideals of freedom and democracy. These ideals however were not meant for African slaves, Native Americans, Chicanos and Asians but for free white men. Under the guise of manifest destiny the United States subdued Native Americans, invaded Mexico and gobbled up its present-day Southwest. It continued its mission of spreading its ideals of freedom and democracy internationally through invasions and wars up to the present. These ideals, however, are oddly measured when democratically elected governments are brought down by the United States. For example, the democratically elected governments of Mohammad Mossadegh of Iran in 1953, Jacobo Arbenz of Guatemala in 1954, Salvador Allende of Chile in 1973, and Manuel Zelaya of Honduras in 2009 were either directly or indirectly overthrown by the United States. Undemocratic governments that are lead by brutal and repressive regimes that comply with United States political and economic policies often replace them. As president Franklin Roosevelt said about the Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza of Nicaragua, "He may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he's our son-of-a-bitch."

Under the presumption that the United States is the guardian of freedom and democracy, the ideological apparatuses of both the private and government sectors are able to convince many people that this presumption is true regardless of the glaring contradiction. One person who spoke out against this contradiction was Malcolm X when he stated, "American democracy, nothing but disguised hypocrisy."

Allegedly, the Aztec sacrificial victims were led up the steps of a temple where they were laid on their backs on a large stone and held down by four priests each holding a limb of the victim. With an obsidian knife in hand a fifth priest would tear open the chest of the honored victim. He would yank out the pulsating heart, cup it in his in hands and hold it up to the heavens as an offering to Huitzilopitchli. The body was then flung down the steps on its way to paradise and eternal glory.

Although the United States certainly does not sacrifice its people in this manner it is more than symbolic when on Memorial Day, speeches honor the war dead who have sacrificed their lives for freedom and democracy. After all, "freedom isn't free," and sacrificing people is abhorrent.

Charley Trujillo is a Vietnam veteran. He served in the Americal Division in Vietnam as an infantry Sergeant from 1-1-70 to 7-26-70. He was wounded and evacuated to Japan. He graduated from UC Berkeley and San Jose State. He is the author of Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam *and* Dogs From Illusion *two Vietnam War books. He also directed the documentary* Soldados: Chicanos in Viet Nam. *He lives in San Jose, California.*

The Innocents

Beware the Fog of War

Harold Trainer

Obama's compromise, or some say capitulation, on extending the Bush tax cuts plus adding more cuts, will increase the national debt by over a trillion dollars when the wars are added. Our government will have to borrow the money to pay for the cuts and continuation of the wars. This will increase inflation, interest rates and the costs of everyday living for the middle and lower class working Americans. It will adversely affect job creation and the standard of living for Americans.

If two Presidents had not bogged us down in Iraq and Afghanistan, we would be able to provide more timely, substantial support to those fighting for freedom in Libya; real freedom, not the freedom we said we were fighting to establish in Iraq. That war was for oil. Or, the freedom in Afghanistan which is, apparently, the freedom to live under a corrupt government. War starts simply but feeds on itself and the next thing you know, you're lost in the fog. Libya could be a stalemate for a long time and when we get tired of the war Qadaffi will kill again. Also, who is going to pay for this expensive endeavor? I thought we were so broke we were going to have to cut the entitlements of our most vulnerable citizens, the elderly, social security, medicare, medicaid, and how about the paltry 1.4% pay raise for our troops and the increased cost of their health care.

The next step will be to cut spending and the Republicans and Democrats in Congress will focus on earned entitlements such as social security, medicaid, medicare and military health benefits. Obama has already said he favors a paltry 1.4% pay increase for the military. This is the lowest pay raise in almost 50 years and is a strange thanks for those who have been fighting our wars for ten years. This really adds up to a tax increase for the middle class and our most needy. All of this while big business and the most wealthy receive huge tax cuts ostensibly to stimulate the economy and earn more for investors. Job creation will be very uncertain. This is another victory for the Republicans and Democrats who are willing to borrow from the future of the elderly, our kids, and grandkids to continue the unnecessary wars and support the most wealthy Americans.

As an example of these cuts in spending, the leaders of the president's National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform proposed substantial increases in TRICARE fees for military retirees under age 65 to the tune of $1000 to $2000 a year for typical families. The commission report recommended even bigger financial hits for Medicare eligible military retirees and their spouses. This is known as TRICARE For Life (TFL) and includes cutbacks of as much as $6000 a year or more per couple. That is in addition to the extra costs they and all other TRICARE users would incur from proposed TRICARE pharmacy hikes.

Ironically, the whole reason Congress authorized TFL in 2001 was to recognize that those who had served and sacrificed for 20 years or more in uniform deserved a benefit significantly greater than that available to those who didn't incur such sacrifices for their country. Now, after nine years of war, some national leaders think those decades of sacrifice were not worth that much. What is worse is they propose a double "whammy" for the nation's most severely wounded warriors. Any wounded or injured servicemember accorded a 30 percent or greater disability rating is medically retired and subject to the same proposed TRICARE fee hikes as other retirees under age 65. Those who are most severly injured are deemed Medicare-eligible and are required to pay Medicare Part B permiums to be eligible for TFL as a second payer. Those with families would be double penalized by these proposals because they would be required to pay all of the increased costs for TRICARE and TFL. Doesn't seem quite right, does it?

Harold Trainer is a retired Air Force Officer and Vietnam Veteran and lives in Prospect Kentucky. He is an adjunct instructor of Business at Jefferson Community College.

The Discontent of Our Winter

Horace Coleman

The economy is bad and may get worse. The natives—at home and abroad—are restless. The first thing many newly-elected Tea Party members did after being elected and oriented was to look for ways to finance their re-election campaigns.

Did you hear President Obama say that the US produces 2% of the world's oil but consumes 25% of the world's oil?

Or, get the news that some California state legislators feel so in danger that they want permits to carry concealed weapons?

How about the US and henchmen making Libya a "no fly zone" for the Libyan air force? Even though our Secretary of Defense didn't think that's such a hot idea, what with us already being in one war whose outcome really isn't settled and another where "progress" is—at best—dubious.

Meanwhile, Sarah Palin complains about Congress' budget cuts being too small. The size of the federal deficit is more important than the well being of the nation's residents. Bust the remaining unions and reduce federal and state employees' benefits. Folks having less discretionary income won't have a negative effect on the nation's economy. The trickle down economy will enrich every one—at the top of society.

Rag on teachers when you don't have any thing better to do. Anyone can teach—although not necessarily well.

Paul Krugman, Nobel Prize winning economist and a *New York Times* columnist, recently wrote:

"Count me among those who were glad to see the documentary "Inside Job" win an Oscar. The film reminded us that the financial crisis of 2008, whose aftereffects are still blighting the lives of millions of Americans, didn't just happen — it was made possible by bad behavior on the part of bankers, regulators and, yes, economists."

"What the film didn't point out, however, is that the crisis has spawned a whole new set of abuses, many of them illegal as well as immoral. Leading political figures are, at long last, showing some outrage. Unfortunately, this outrage is directed, not at banking abuses, but at those trying to hold banks accountable for these abuses."

Political commentator and journalist Ronald Brownstein wrote a piece in the *National Journal* with the subhead "The problem isn't that public-sector

continued on next page

Boots on the ground at LA demo, March 19, 2011. Photo by Horace Coleman.

War Games

Gregory Ross

For three years in the late 1970's I did child care for a living. In spring of 1976 I found myself unemployed again. A friend suggested I go to a free training program run by an organization called Bananas. It trained people to be child care workers and offered job referrals as well. I always liked kids, so it seemed like a good idea.

The training was simple for the oldest child, brother of two sisters whose parents both worked to just get by. As one of only a few men in the field I was both suspect and in demand. For the first six months through Bananas I substituted in almost every child care situation. I worked in infant programs, preschool programs and after school programs [which really are before and after school]. Before I got a full time job in an after school program and was no longer on the Bananas' substitute referral list there was not a week that went by that some little kid, walking down the street with her/his parent didn't yell out, "Hi, Greg"; often to the consternation of their parent, who probably had not met me because I had substituted. At that time I had hair down to my belt and a Grizzly Adams beard but, I always tried to put the parent at ease with the explanation of my substitute status. It didn't always work.

In fall of 1976 a full-time position opened up at an after school program where I had substituted a number of times. The kids knew and liked me. The woman who ran the program suggested I apply for the position and when I said I would be happy to do that she said, "Good, then you're hired." Thus, I began my career in Child Care. In the six months before she hired me, working in every conceivable type of child care facility, I had garnered a reputation as being a Good Limit Setter [GLS]. Somehow my fear that a child would get hurt on my watch turned into GLS. Turned out to be good for me.

I worked that job until 1979, just before I went into the "Young Vets Program" in the Menlo Park, CA VA. I left because I could no longer stand to go to work. Early on in my full-time status I ran up against children, especially boys, playing "War Games." I knew that I could not stop them. As a matter of fact, trying to squelch those games only made them more appealing. My final solution was to inform the kids that I had one hard and fast rule: they could not shoot me. When asked why I told them that I had been in a real war and it was not fun. A couple of "time outs" and that rule became firm.

I left because one day during a "War Game," in which four boys were going at it hot and heavy, I kept wanting to step in and tell the one who just ran out in the open and shot his "finger gun" with abandon that if he was going to do it that he should do it right because doing it wrong could get him killed, but I didn't. Then one of the boys, the one who instinctively got it right: stay out of sight and show no mercy, came out from behind a cabinet and he was no longer a nine year old in the gym with a stick for a gun pretending to kill and die but a nineteen year old, in a real uniform, a real piece in his hand and he got hit. The kids told me I fell down, started yelling, "No" and crying. My boss was sympathetic but was not upset when I told her I was quitting.

In 1990, my eight year old son and three of his friends were engaged in War Games with Super Soakers in our back yard. One of his friends asked me to join. My son got the "here comes the lecture" look on his face when his friend asked. Much to his surprise I grabbed his super soaker and ran towards the front of the house. Before they could mobilize I had disappeared. They regrouped in the back yard at a loss for what to do. I had climbed onto the roof. I commenced to ambush them to cries of "No fair" and "That is cheating." I just smiled and viewed it as an object lesson, but couldn't stop myself from yelling down, "there are no rules to war, it is not a game." Later my son wanted to know why I always had to spoil the fun.

Gregory Ross: Navy veteran, served on the Gun Line off the coast of Vietnam [1968-69]. Graduate of a VA drug, alcohol and PTSD program [1980]; a Detox Acupuncturist [1989] and published in Veterans of War, Veterans of Peace.

The Discontent of Our Winter

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workers have too much retirement security. It's that everyone else has too little."

Having drunk the traditional Kool-Aid, the general public is more interested in seeing that slightly better off workers get less than those worse off. You have to wonder if the greatest threat to the American people isn't the unholy combination of American practices and people.

The VVA *Veteran* has an article in it entitled "A Few Well-Chosen Words" written by David Willson. Willson discuses Vietnam vets who are poets and well regarded or relatively unknown but good writers.

Several VVAW members are in Willson's rankings. In alphabetical order they are Jan Barry, Horace Coleman, David Connolly, W.D. Ehrhart and Gerald McCarthy.

Barry and Erhart also have edited important anthologies by Vietnam vet poets; McCarthy has written scholarly articles and presented papers about Nam vet poets at conferences.

What many here think is that America—claiming that title for the US alone as citizens tend to—is "the exception to the rule." What too many people here choose to consciously ignore is that every super power or empire that ever was had periods of advance and decline before an inevitable and permanent fall from global center stage.

It might be a combination of regional, religious, ethnic or internal/external conflict that made a nation or empire get the historical hook. It could be economics, politics, or climactic change. Maybe sexism played a role. Perhaps excessive dynasty, oligarchy or plutocracy had a hand.

Perhaps excessive, ineffective and decadent oligarchies and plutocracies sped up falls. How about vastly extreme and unequal social divisions? Others superior technology, civilization, ideology or will? Whatever the combination of actions, circumstances and causes, the failure of an individual, system, or society to "meet the challenge" (what ever that might be) can be fatal.

Stay tuned. That US invented "Chinese" curse has come true. We are living in "interesting times!" Can you say "over stretch" or "incompetence?"

Horace Coleman was an Air Force air traffic controller/ intercept director in Vietnam (1967-68).

LA demo, March 19, 2011. Photo by Horace Coleman.

Welcome Home Young War Vets (Now Pretend You Are Normal)

Jim Murphy

Tonight, after you've finished reading this article, I want you to think about these numbers: 75,000 – the minimum number of veterans that are homeless tonight; 200,000 – the minimum number of veterans incarcerated right now in state and county jails. Exact numbers are unknown because no one is compiling accurate data. The numbers quoted are probably minimal estimates. The next question is, how many of these incarcerated veterans are Iraq and/or Afghanistan Veterans? Using the percentages compiled by California and Pennsylvania, 35,000 (or more) are veterans from the aforementioned wars.

Welcome Home. Welcome home to these graduates of our high schools following 12 years of saying the 'Pledge Of Allegiance', high schools that welcomed the military and their promises of "being all you can be." Welcome home to these believers of the military recruiters that they would probably not serve in a war zone, that they would get excellent career training and that their education would be paid for if they simply applied to any college. Welcome Home! Veterans and concerned citizens are usually not allowed into high schools to talk about the morality of war, the sheer brutality and how it colors the rest of veterans' lives.

The primary predictors for incarceration are past violent behavior followed by alcohol and drug abuse and aggressive behaviors. These are also main factors for having a successful suicide. Out-dated studies (2004) claim that PTSD has presented in over 300,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. Overlapping that number is that number the veterans that suffer from traumatic brain injury (TBI) estimated at 330,000.

We still haven't studied those veterans' issues after the Vietnam War. When we came home from Vietnam, we weren't able to self-analyze the changes in our behaviors. I believe that would be true of WWII, Korea and the young men and women coming home today. My friends and I truly believed that the sleepless nights and depression would go away. Alcohol became the center of many of our lives and to a lesser degree, marijuana. Heroin was also around for those that had had a taste in Vietnam. Self-medication was the habit of the day then and it is now.

Over 50% of the incarcerated veterans are in jail for drug-related crimes, often part of a self-medication schedule to help with PTSD and/or TBI. If the only job that you can complete is drug dealer, you may do it. Crimes committed under the influence of alcohol are also a major contributor to the number of incarcerated veterans. The Veterans Administration (VA) has developed several very effective methods for helping veterans with PTSD and/or TBI but they are overwhelmed and the immediacy of the need will never be met. Two promising, non-VA programs that are showing great success for incarcerated veterans are a special court system, started in Buffalo, NY, that serves war veterans specifically. Drug rehabilitation and alternatives such as unique counseling programs are available to the young war veterans. For those already locked up, San Francisco County Jail #5 is a structure that houses only war veterans and provides specific health, education and job training services to help many of these young veterans to finally come home.

We have started a group reading program whereby groups of incarcerated Iraq and Afghanistan veterans do a group read, all reading and discussing a chosen book. Then they all do a speed write/critique and follow up with a written statement of feelings in prose or poetry form. We will then print chat books from the group to be shared only with friends and family. The first book sent to groups in eight prisons was Martin Luther King's *Where Do We Go From Here*. Our second book will be Tim O'Brien's book, *The Things They Carried.* If you have contacts in prisons or that you would like to become involved in the Veterans Prison Reading Project, please contact Jim Murphy at ivetsfor@gmail.com or write to FOR at 521 N. Broadway, Upper Nyack, NY 10960.

Jim Murphy served in Vietnam 1966 (TDY) and in 1968. High School Dean in NYC from 1981-2004. Presently retired in Ithaca, NY. Anti-war activist from 1971 with VVAW and currently with VVAW, VFP 038 and Veterans Fellowship Of Reconciliation

VVAW Taking It to the Classroom

Aaron Davis

In February , a special operations team led by VVAW activists, made an incursion into the most conservative city and county in the reddest state in the union. Members Rick Miller and William Cobb, along with Vietnam vet Lewis Downey, presented a panel for 2 hours to high school history students of the Walden Private school in Provo, Utah.

History professor William Cobb brought along some of his history students from Utah Valley University to record the panel. He is currently compiling a Vietnam Veterans History project.

Walden school history teacher Eric Beecroft said," Just wanted to say a huge thanks to all of you for the panel. It was a very powerful event for the students, some said it was the best thing they had participated in all year. I appreciate both your time and willingness to share such powerful and difficult aspects of your experiences in war. Hope to have you back again soon."

Rick Miller and William Cobb speak to high school history students about their experiences in Vietnam. Photo by Aaron Davis.

Jim Ketola, Presente!

Steve Morse and Lee Thorn

Jim Ketola, 1948-2011, was an anti-war veteran and labor activist. He was killed by a motorist in Stockton, California on the rainy night of March 23rd.

Jim did two and a half tours in Vietnam as a tunnel rat and sniper, among other duties. He finished his Army hitch at the end of 1971 in the Presidio hospital, recovering not from a combat injury but from an attack by an Army lifer, over Jim's increasingly vocal anti-war activism. Jim became immersed in the San Francisco VVAW chapter right away, taking part in actions such as the takeover of the Air Force Recruiters' office in San Francisco in response to the April 1972 bombing of North Vietnam. Jim later was active in Veteran Speakers Alliance and Veterans For Peace.

Jim grew up poor in the iron range country of upstate Minnesota, around many other Finnish Americans. By his teen years, he had learned the woods and logged when he could get the work. Jim was a welder in the Bay Area for over 30 years, in both the Boilermakers' and Steamfitters' unions. At career's end, he was still climbing on top of refineries doing the most dangerous and most skilled work. He'd say, "It's better if I do these things – I know what I'm doing." For years, Jim helped publish "Hard Hat," a rank and file construction workers' journal.

Jim worked hard, was on constant alert, talked to anyone and everyone and at length, was a loyal friend to many, and was a mentor to several youngsters. There was a gleam in Jim's eye as he fused information with irony in telling a story, recounting a piece of history or making a class-conscious observation.

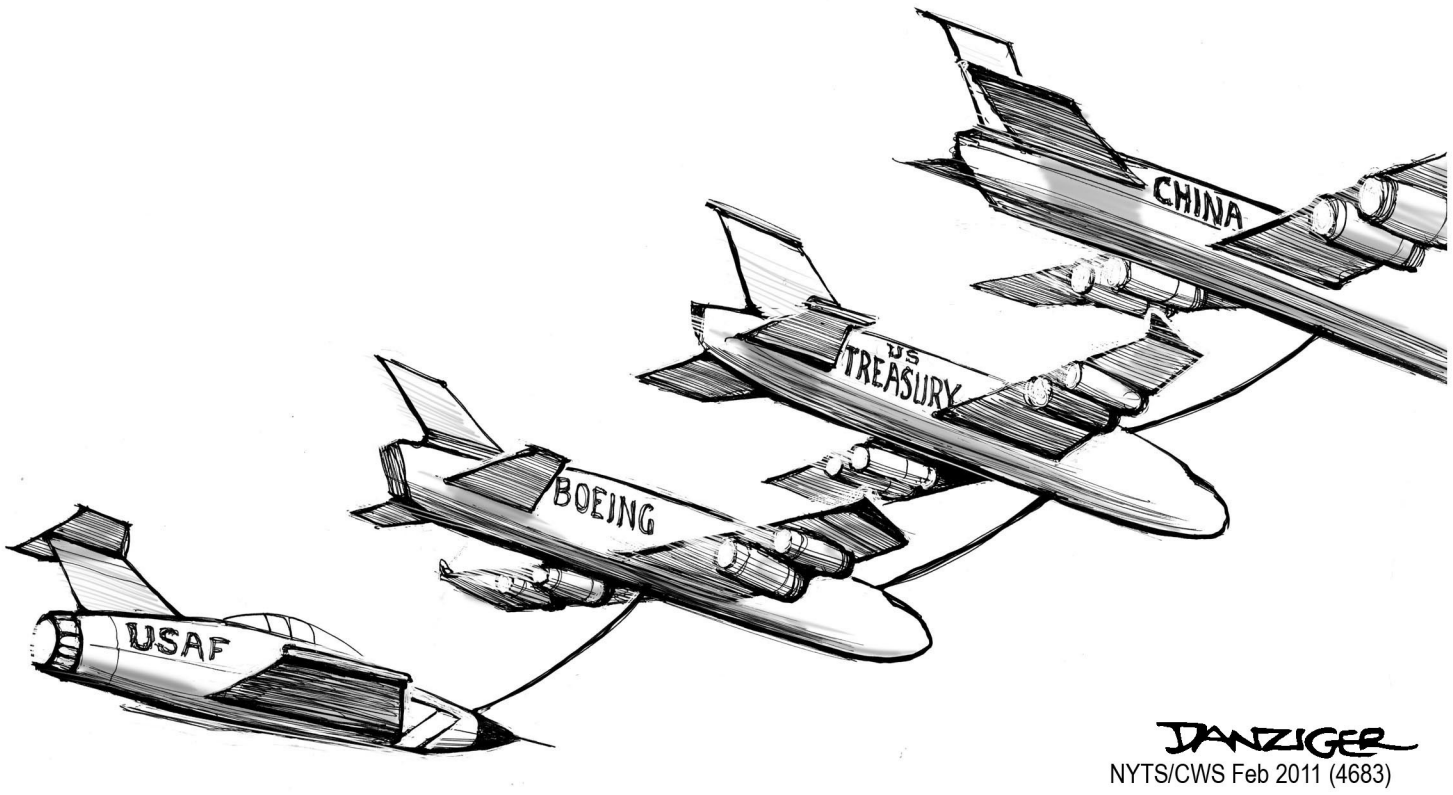
Jim had a heart operation and an aneurysm in rapid succession. He felt both lucky to survive and that his mind had been affected. At the end, he was living in shelters and in a cardboard box with a woman friend in Stockton.

Jim both studied war and hated it. He had deep knowledge of the history, politics, culture and wars of Vietnam. He did his second tour to keep his brother out of Vietnam. Jim's father had been in the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, a fact his father hadn't bothered to tell him. Jim was both an excellent soldier and a consistent activist for peace and justice for 40 years. He thus had an intense and complex relationship to war, and to the war that finally took him.

He is survived by his wife Gretchen Koch, from whom he had been separated for several years, and by their sons Erkke and Michael.

Steve and Lee have been active in Bay Area anti-war veterans' work since they were in the San Francisco VVAW chapter in the early '70's.

Off We Go!



NYTS/CWS Feb 2011 (4683)

This is What Democracy Should Look Like

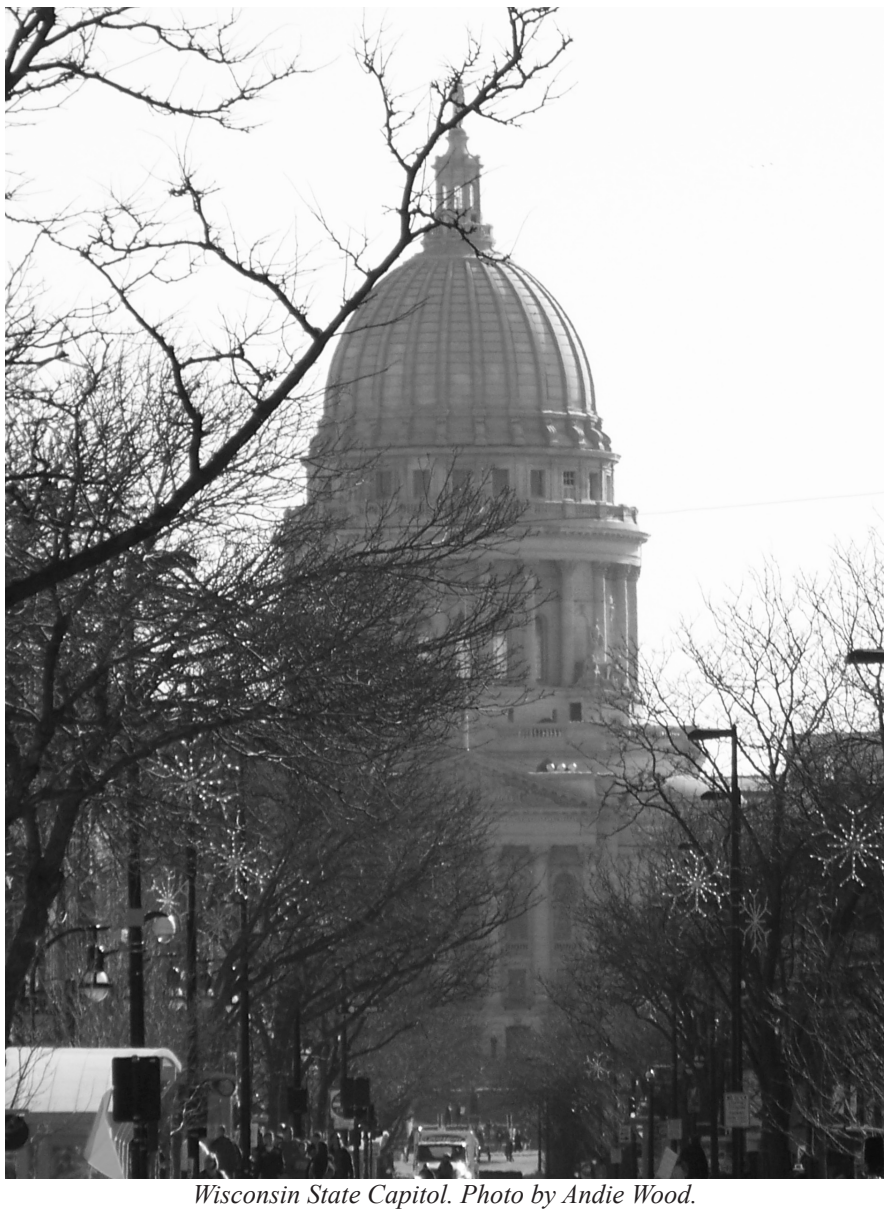
Michael Orange

Someone began tapping their glass in the Madison restaurant. We weren't at a wedding. My wife and I were taking a break in the middle of our second day of protesting in Wisconsin's capital city in solidarity with public sector unions whose collective bargaining rights were under attack. I was there as a member of Veterans For Peace, VVAW, and as a 30-year-veteran of the public union I helped found for the City of Minneapolis. It was also forty years since I participated in the famed VVAW march on Washington the April after the first Winter Soldier hearings. Soon the entire restaurant joined in the clinking. It was the same rhythm drivers had been beeping on their horns throughout the Capitol Square area for several weeks—the rhythm that matched the oft-heard chant, "Tell me what democracy looks like. THIS is what democracy looks like!" Then we broke into spontaneous applause.

Back on the street, we carried the Veterans For Peace sign, "How's the War Economy Working for You?" to remind people of the connections between our devastating wars in the Middle East and our devastated economy. The recent homegrown democracy movements arising throughout the Middle East prove the point that we can't drop democracy from the bomb rack of an F-15 or fire it from a Bradley Fighting Vehicle. In Tunisia as in Madison, the people themselves secure their democratic rights through tough battles and constant vigilance.

Amazing what happened when Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, only two months in office, (with help from the Republican state legislators) decided to strip most of the collective bargaining rights from most of the state's public employees; rights they had gained fifty years earlier. One joke circulating when we were there—the weekend daylight savings time went into effect—was, "If you're in Wisconsin this weekend, don't forget to turn your clocks back 50 years!"

Walker did what we in the peace movement have been trying to do for decades—he united disparate groups in a social justice movement that is gaining strength throughout our country. In the forty years we've been marching, we've never before raised voices—or signs—with labor, farmers, cops, or firefighters. From babies in strollers to high school students who left classes to march, to seniors in walkers, over 100,000 of us marched together. One young dad who taught in a little town some distance away said he'd been there for three weekends straight with his two toddlers. "We've been here so often, my four-year-old-son walks around our house chanting, 'Show me what democracy looks like!' and he gets disappointed if my wife and I don't yell back, 'THIS is what democracy looks like!" And nearby, an older guy with a World War II baseball hat, a tough grizzled face, and a cigarette hanging out of his mouth, carried his sign, "Now you've pissed off grandpa!"



Wisconsin State Capitol. Photo by Andie Wood.

The huge and diverse crowd went wild when a tractor-cade of farmers from all over the state rode their machines into Capitol Square. "Thank you! Thank you! Thank you, farmers!" went the wild chant. We were especially proud to see the Vets For Peace "War Economy" sign displayed on many of the tractors, and had to look twice when we saw a VFW tractor roll by us. Yes, THIS is what democracy should always look like.

Of course, we know America is still the richest country in the world, and that there's no true lack of resources. They're just too concentrated in the wrong hands. One has to look back a hundred years, back to the Robber Baron Era, to find the current level of income inequality. Sign after sign pointed the way to the culprits that bankrupt the country — the Pentagon's wars, private war profiteers, the Wall Street banksters and moneychangers, and rich corporations and individuals that don't pay their fair share for the common good; not working class people and public employees.

The global corporations and the rich use the military strategy of divide and conquer to control the rest of us, but they over-reached. The amazing unity on display in Madison is the first beachhead of the resistance movement to take back America.

IVAW Marching in Madison, Wisconsin, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

Michael Orange served as a Marine in Vietnam and wrote a book about it, Fire in the Hole: A Mortarman in Vietnam. *He joined VVAW during the group's famed April 1971 march on Washington. Professionally, he's a city planner and teaches a graduate-level course, Sustainable City Planning.*

10,000 Join Iraq War Vets in Madison March and Rally

Kim Scipes

March 19, 2011

Got back from Madison a couple of hours ago, took a nap, and want to share some comments.

The anti-war veterans' organization, Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), sponsored a rally and march to the Wisconsin State Capitol today in Madison. On the 8th anniversary of the US invasion of Iraq, ordered by George W. Bush, it seemed very appropriate for IVAW to mobilize.

We assembled in the University of Wisconsin(UW) Library plaza, marched up State Street, were met by the Firefighters and their bagpipers, and marched around the Capitol. There were a significant number of people behind us—I was in front, as part of security for the IVAW contingent—and many people waited for the march, both on State Street and at the Capitol.

IVAW certainly touched a nerve of those who came out: there was much appreciation, many thank you's for the vets, and we were all greeted quite warmly.

There were a large number of speakers at the Capitol, many union speakers, including the current and former Presidents of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO.

There were many union members in the crowd. I especially noted members of LIUNA (the Laborers), the Boilermakers, SEIU, AFSCME and the Teamsters.

There's one thing that IVAW added to the protests. IVAW CONSISTENTLY tied the wars in Iraq and Afganistan to the assault on workers here at home. Speakers today spoke again and again on the economic war against people across our society. Now, seeing the economic war going on against most of us has probably been often recognized by others, but it was the CONSISTENT tying this into the wars that I think was unique about IVAW's protest today.

I think this was a MAJOR contribution of IVAW's efforts today: recognizing that the corporate elite and most of our governmental officials were attacking Americans — and while initially directed at workers, has broadened with its attacks on education, health care, etc., through budget attacks—so as to keep funding their wars overseas. And today, the US attacked Libya.

What appears to be happening too is that more and more people are tying things together: first the attack on unions and collective bargaining, the escalating attacks on social services for all people, and now, with IVAW, tying this into the wars. My sense is that ordinary women and men are far ahead of their leaders, and particularly many labor leaders. Although many people are fired up about recalling Republican officials and depending on the courts for redress, I think most people recognize the need to do all of that AND also take things out of the box of day-to-day life. My sense from today is that many labor leaders want, perhaps desperately, to keep things within the realm of electoral politics, while a growing number of people at least recognize the need to go farther. Whether those who want to go farther can make that a reality or not is certainly an interesting question—but then again, anybody who doubted the staying power of these mobilizations a few weeks ago certainly must reconsider what they thought possible before. This ain't over yet!

IVAW members on stage, Madison, Wisconsin. Photo by Andie Wood.

Kim Scipes, Ph.D., served in the US Marine Corps from 1969-73, attaining the rank of Sergeant and receiving an Honorable Discharge. He currently works as an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Purdue University North Central in Westville, IN.

Madison, Wisconsin, March 19, 2011.

Once More Into The Breach….

Willie Hager

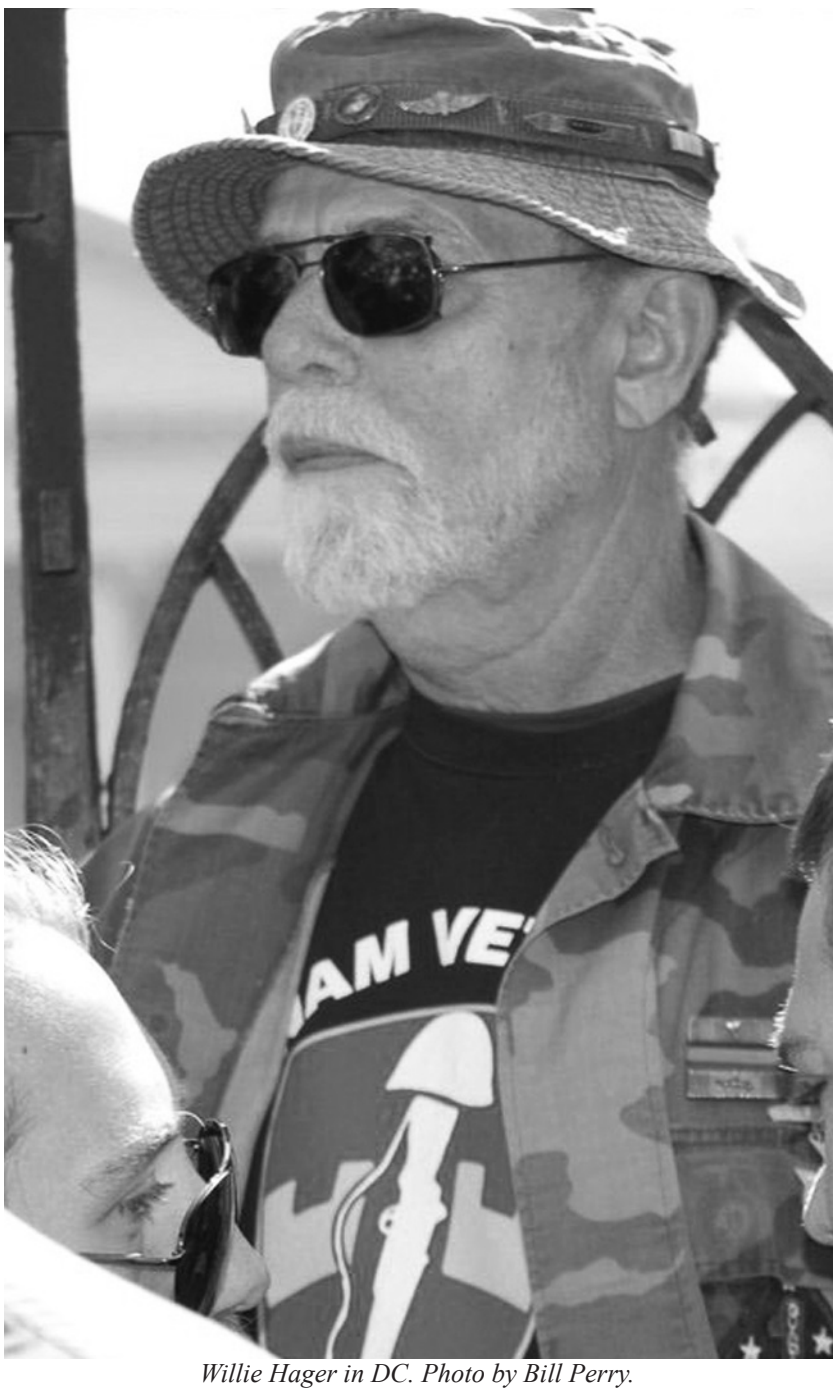
VVAW came to Washington DC to participate, with a broad coalition, in protest under the banner: STOP THESE WARS - EXPOSE THE LIES - FREE BRADLEY MANNING. There were VVAW groups from Baltimore, Philadelphia, Baton Rouge, Ohio, the Southeast, the Northeast region, and I came from Jacksonville FL. VVAW came, as always, with a strong spirit and good organizational skills.

Prior to the march, on 19 March 2011, there were a couple of hours of speeches by various organizational representatives. Most notably on message, to me, were those of Michael Kern of Vets For Peace (VFP) and Amber Stone of IVAW. The troops were getting restless, you could bottle the emotion. Finally, we marched forth from Lafayette Park.

I was privileged to be on the lead banner for the parade, along with Jason Hurd. It was a strong image of Veterans' unity around the march's demands, the VFP banner demanding STOP THESE WARS – EXPOSE THE LIES – FREE BRADLEY MANNING, flanked by Veterans in IVAW and VVAW colors. As I looked back down the line during traffic pauses it appeared that the march stretched out for blocks, and was rich with marchers, signs, and color. Solemn Veterans shuffling along silently, in lead of a colorful and chanting contingent of pissed off protestors, a rewarding visual. Our cadence was a Korean Drum group that marched right behind the Veterans.

As we approached the White House, the area immediately in front of it had been cordoned off. There were cops everywhere; walking, flying, and riding horses. They had a little booking tent, and two awaiting Metro buses already in place, right out in the middle, blocking the view from the street on the other side of their cordon, which was filled with protestors. On the business side of the booking tent, veterans had begun lining the White House fence. There were other folks there as well. Daniel Ellsberg and Col. Ann Wright came too take a stand with us, and be arrested with us. The effervescent Code Pink ladies entertained with political cheer-leading routines as the rest of us tensely awaited the order to disperse.

It didn't come for a long time. When it did, it was low key as Ward negotiated the arrest of Daniel Ellsberg, and Ann Wright. Shortly after that they arrested Ward and began to arrest the remaining individuals, one at a time, including the Code Pink ladies in their regalia, a very surrealistic scene. It was a long process that was intended, I am sure, to dampen our spirits. But, it didn't work. During the whole process, I saw no Cable or Network news groups, but plenty of alternative media. It was all so unspectacular. Obviously, the powers-that-be realized that low-key was the way to go. They were well organized for the task, were courteous enough, and were well schooled in managing dissent. The cops probably made lots of overtime and certainly raked in lots of bail money. There were ultimately 113 arrested, at $100.00 a pop. They finally took us to a county holding facility, where they were all set up for a quick 'n' easy processing-out.



Willie Hager in DC. Photo by Bill Perry.

Later, as we were released, we gathered just off jail property where pre-arranged shuttles were picking folks up and carrying them back to their hotels, it was down time. My new friend, Marcia Westbrook of Ohio was our benefactor, and allowed us to share her room with her. It sort of became the Harrington Hotel VVAW hospitality room. We had a cooler of beer and plenty to smoke. Watermelon Slim played tunes throughout the evening. There were VVAW types that went back together, forty years. What a great PTSD therapy session that evening. Then, all too soon, it was time to turn in, as we were all headed to Quantico MCB, to protest in support of Bradley Manning, the next morning, the 20th of March.

Would I do it all again? For the right objectives; not just YES, but HELL YES. But I do think that we should all rethink our long term position in light of the economy, and the new age of instant communications and electronic networking, and perhaps begin to design some winning strategies out in the grass-roots, and bring our message to America's door steps, rather than to just Obama's. I sadly believe now that "they" have figured out how to deal with the tactics that we have carried over from back in the day. We must build an effective and modern grass-roots anti-war movement for the 21st century… all the rest is history.

IVAW members in DC, March 19, 2011. Photo by Bill Perry.

Willie Hager is currently the Administrative Coordinator of VetSpeak.org.

How History Gets Written

Say I discover a cure for cancer;
say that it's cheap and never fails.
Say I restore the Arctic ice pack.
Say I preserve the Amazon.

Say I eliminate fossil fuels
and turn the babble of politicians
into an endless supply of energy,
non-polluting and free to all.

Maybe I guarantee every child
parents and schools and shelter and love.
Maybe I make mean people suck
on their thumbs. Maybe I save the whales.

What if I build a gun that doesn't shoot,
a bomb that doesn't explode, a bright pink tank?
What if I find clean water for those in need?
What if I put an end to poverty?

Say that I learn the secret of harmony,
teach the nations to live in peace.
Say I can tell you how many angels
dance on the head of a pin.

What if I line up the stars like pearls
and drape them across the Himalayas?
What would you think? What would you do?
What would you write in your history books?

—W. D. Ehrhart

Cult of the Wounded

Blood unleashed from the body,
coppery scent, pungent,
evokes in all of us
a primal need to survive.
Machine-gun fire sporadic,
AK's popping,
M-16's responding to the challenge,
smoke grenades billowing yellow.
The wounded scream and beg for help as
Medevac pilots brave
spider-web cracks radiating
through Plexiglas windshields.
Everyone there, all of us,
risked our lives to save the wounded,
caring not what assholes
they might have been
ere metal hot and unpasteurized
entered yielding flesh,
changing forever the victim's status
to holy icon
of our own most heartfelt yearnings.

—Paul Hellweg

Listen to Veterans

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at the 1972 Republican National Convention in Miami, Vietnam Veterans Against the War (who were running security for IVAW in Madison) were the young bucks and does in tight t-shirts on the streets with the 1,000 yard stares. I was the sultry, long-haired woman on the stage with the guitar. And everywhere – and I mean everywhere – there was controversy, opposition, debate and dialogue. Change happened as a direct result of thousands of very painful exchanges. Our actions were purpose-driven and relentless. Disillusionment, like catharsis, was a means, not an end. Banding together was a means, not an end. These actions helped us sort through our thoughts and motives to stay on the straight and narrow path for change. Rhetoric about "winning the fight" and "them and us," became increasingly meaningless as more and more of our brothers and sisters lost their lives in senseless combat.

In Madison, on March 19th, it was IVAW's day. The message was clearly written on the faces and in the strides of the veterans and workers who were there. No "Wuck Falker" signs, or amazing singing grannies could touch the heart and spirit like a single IVAW veteran walking with purpose toward the capitol dome – no less in a formation of fifty or more. As Gerry Nicosia wrote in his huge (and controversial) Vietnam Veterans' movement tome, *Home to War*: "They were clearly soldiers, their faces, and sometimes their bodies, showed that they had been there. These men spoke with the voice of experience, and their chants erupted from somewhere deep in their guts, with an irrefutable conviction." I guarantee you that not one IVAW vet needs the ego inflation that the recall of one errant politician would bring, if it would mean bringing one more soldier home alive today. They want an end to the occupations NOW. It really is a matter of life and death.

As I scanned the crowd, sans guitar, part of the security contingent for IVAW now, I saw that same irrefutable conviction in all of the faces of the veterans around me: IVAW's Aaron Hughes leading the way, Kelly Dougherty showing she still cares. Jason Moon rousing the crowd with his voice, songs and guitar. Big John Zutz standing like a mountain behind the stage, scanning the crowd for any signs of trouble in his role with VVAW security. Marty Webster (despite health problems) "personed" the stage gate. Retired mail-handler, Barry Romo – with no less than 40 years of service to fellow veterans as a leader of VVAW – kept the security contingent alert and on the job. Three first-time security workers, teenagers Aleah Anderson, Andie Wood and Milly "Sachi" Wood, struggled to balance keeping an eye on the crowd with the draw of dynamic speakers and a moving contingent of firefighters. There were other VVAW veterans and supporters on the security, to name some of them, Patti Gmeiner (Western WI), Brian Matarrese (New York), Hannah Frisch (Chicago), Red Kettenhofen (Milwaukee), Janet Parker (Madison), Kathleen Taylor, Nicky Baltrushes, Rich Peters, Kim Scipes. All, including the ones I cannot name, willingly endured personal and financial sacrifice to lend their presence to the cause.

Vince Emanule in Madison, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

When I dragged my overly weary butt back to the rent-a-car that afternoon, it wasn't the festive aspects of what I'd witnessed in Madison that stayed with me: It was the haunting faces of the veterans marching two abreast at the front of the parade. Straight past the clever signs, three powerful contingents of American veterans: Iraq Vets Against the War, Vietnam Veterans Against the War and Vets For Peace said NO! to a 9th year in Iraq and the calling up of the national guard to defend a misguided governor. As singer-songwriter and IVAW member Jason Moon said, "Scott Walker! You don't need to call the National Guard – we're already here!"

We've got the marches, protests and signs to give voice to the problems. We've got solid recall actions. We've got camaraderie and information. But how do we get the power players into the same room to pound out real solutions to these crucial, life-threatening issues? Solutions that work for the few but negatively impact the many aren't good enough. "There cannot be a dictatorship," noted Spring Valley, WI educator Ned Hilleren. Debate, dialogue and action initiated by a vital, concerned citizenry leading to change is what it is all about. Without the whole spectrum of opinions present, actions like March 19th could end up being just another feel-good, Sunday in the Park with George.

Ask a veteran: Time is too precious for that.

IVAW at Wisconsin State Capitol, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

Di Wood is a VetSpeak Co-Founder and VVAW Supporter.

DC After Action Report

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they will still call it a war or not) were unacceptable.

"First, bankrupting our children and grandchildren with the need for ever more deficit spending to cover two wars—economically unacceptable!

Militarily overextending US forces for years, to the point that there would not be sufficient forces to bring to bear in the event of attack by a potential real enemy like North Korea—militarily unacceptable!

And the creation of more and more combat veterans, maimed in body and mind, in a war that has no real prospect to end—socially and morally unacceptable!

Mr. Obama, these started as Bush's wars. They are your wars now, and I can't believe I'm having to say that. Why not bring our troops home and let the country reap the peace dividend of the net difference between logistically supporting two wars, and threatening in other theatres, and bringing the troops lunch on the southern border?

I have a suggestion for you: why don't you bring our troops home and station them on the southern border if you want to satisfy both right and left at the same time? If you provide a military mission that honorably defends America, you will never lack for recruits.

A US combat role in Afghanistan through at least 2014? Utterly unacceptable!

Mr. Obama, the Vietnam Veterans Against the War are back in Washington, as we were in 1971 when the man in the White House was Richard Nixon. We're saying now exactly what we were saying then:

Bring 'em home. Bring our brothers home. Bring our brothers and sisters home—NOW."

That night, there were IVAW events which raised significant money for Operation Recovery.

We got to Quantico Marine Base, south of Washington in Virginia, early Sunday afternoon. Zach Choate was first to speak. The 10th Mountain division turret gunner was given the Purple Heart when he suffered injuries from an IED attack. He resurrected all the ghosts of Operation Dewey Canyon III when he asked, "What does this Constitution mean, when Bradley Manning is being treated like this?" He tossed the pocket copy of the US Constitution to the ground.

"What do all these ribbons mean? They're worthless, if he's being treated this way." And with that ripped medals, Combat Action Badge, Unit Commendation and name tag off his dress greens, leaving nothing on the shirt but a "Free Bradley Manning" button. Zach had to really work hard to get through his speech, but he had his brothers standing behind him. This is a young man with a great soul.

Bill Homans in DC, March 19, 2011. Photo by Bill Perry.

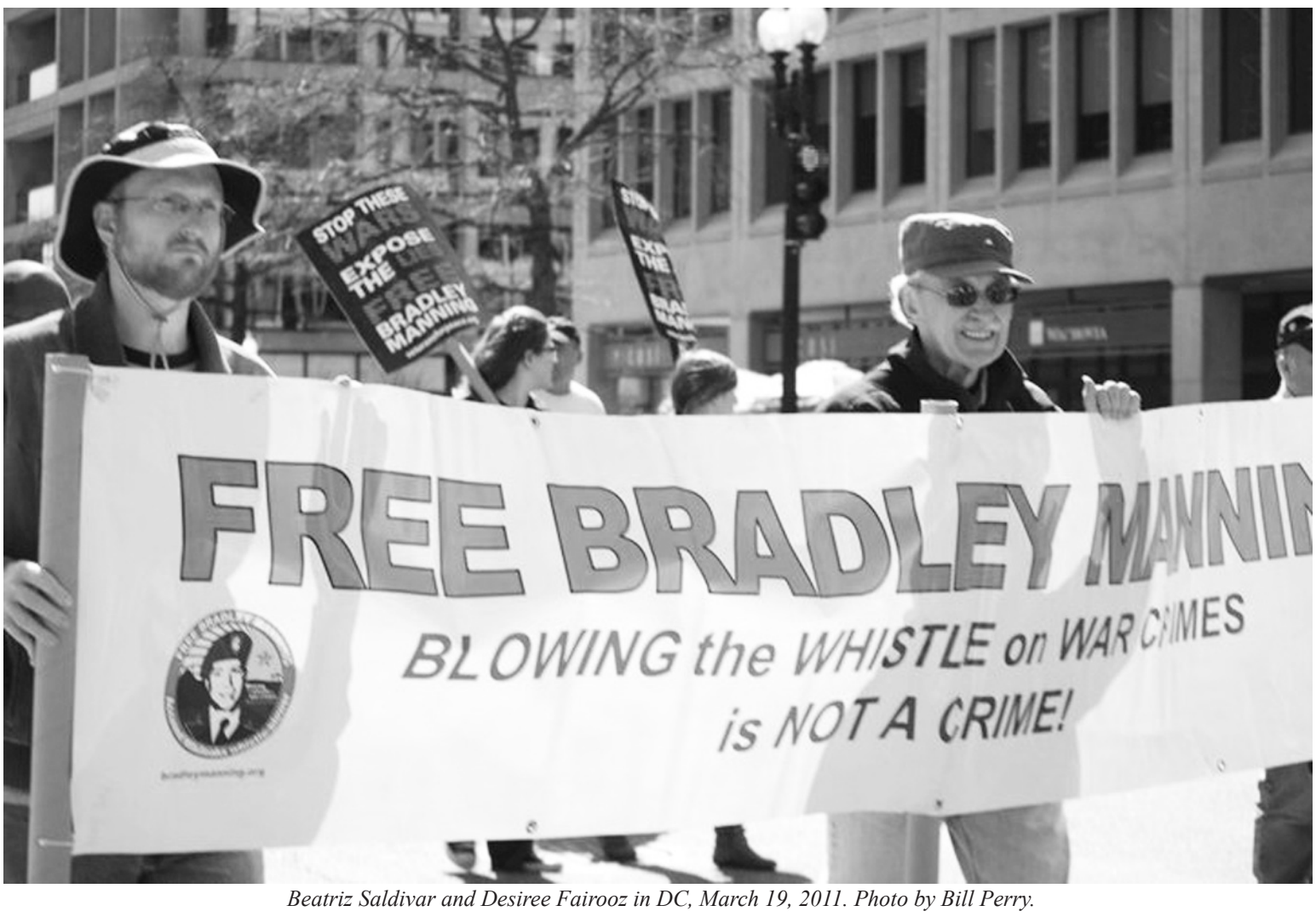
Among the speakers was David Hames, who, somehow, has been able to see Bradley Manning. This is a spectacular looking and speaking young "computer scientist," as he identified himself. I suggested to him that he was a special person for Bradley Manning, and to keep on being there for him.

Eventually, after I had played Taps, Choate, Ellsberg, Wright and several others tried to lay flowers at the Memorial but were denied access. The flowers had to be laid through the fence. Rather significant symbolism, I thought. Eventually, Ellsberg, Wright and 28 others were arrested by the Virginia State Police for sitting down in the road opposite the Memorial.

I was honored to have joined Ellsberg in arrest twice now, though my musical role, and my security role, were more important at Quantico. We had to get home, and could not spend the night in a Virginia jail, so we busted ass back for Mississippi, or in Zach Choate's case, Baton Rouge. He oughta be as far south as Jackson now, on the Blues Highway (US 61 runs right from Clarksdale to Baton Rouge).

I will be back in Washington DC again. The wars are not going away.

Bill Homans is the VVAW contact for Mississippi.



Beatriz Saldivar and Desiree Fairooz in DC, March 19, 2011. Photo by Bill Perry.

Connecting Issues: Iraq War Vets March in Solidarity with Labor

Nathan Toth

On Saturday March 19th, 2011 in Madison, Wisconsin, members of Iraq Veterans Against the War marched up State Street followed by members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Veterans for Peace, public workers, private-sector workers, students, and retired persons to protest the budget repair bill and next budget proposed by the governor of Wisconsin and the Republican controlled legislature. Republican Governor Scott Walker has proposed a budget repair bill and budget that strips collective bargaining rights for most public sector workers and cuts pay by 8-9% by requiring higher premiums on health insurance and increase contributions to pensions. And those aren't the worst parts of the bills. He wants to take direct control of BadgerCare, Wisconsin's implementation of Medicaid, so he can kick off the poorest Wisconsinites. He wants the power to sell state owned power plants to private industry with a no bid, no review process. He wants to gut social services, the same ones that help homeless families, single mothers, orphans, immigrants, the poorest among us, and the disabled. His cuts to the education system will amount to over $1 billion. Wisconsin is known for having some of the best schools in the country, but that could all change under Governor Walker.

When Governor Walker took office, the state was projected to have a small surplus by the end of the budget cycle. But Scott Walker decided to give a sizeable tax cut ($140 million) to big businesses and the wealthy in Wisconsin. This was so they would create jobs. Well, unemployment hasn't changed much (it's gone down slightly, along with the rest of the nation). To fix his manufactured budget crisis, he announced a budget repair bill that hurts the neediest people in Wisconsin.

This act kicked off weeks of peaceful protests and sit-ins at the Capitol. Firefighters and police officers would protest with union workers and students after their shifts. Corrections officers took vacation time and brought their whole families to spend days at the Capitol. State Senators fled the state to hold up the vote on the bill. And influential figures from all over the country flew in to protest alongside Wisconsinites. Jesse Jackson came a couple times and led students from Madison's East High School.

For weeks, local and regional members of Iraq Veterans Against the War participated in the protests. We protested because we think it's wrong that our country spends trillions on war while our economy is in the tank, people lose their jobs, local budgets are cut because there's no money, and the rich get to laugh all the way to the bank. The cost of one cruise missile is enough to pay 10 teachers for 1 year, or help every homeless veteran in Madison, or restore art and music classes to hundreds of Wisconsin children. We believe that war spending has made a big impact on, and may be largely responsible for, the state of our economy. It's time to end the wars and occupations and bring our troops home.

The March 19th protest was to send a message, a loud and clear message, that Wisconsinites are tired of sending billions to Iraq and Afghanistan while taking budget cuts and pay cuts here. A couple hundred people marched up State Street, and met up with firefighters half way. The march was met at the capitol with thousands of supporters and protestors. A rally was held and IVAW members spoke, along with music by the Raging Grannies and Jason Moon, an Iraq War vet and tireless advocate for homeless veteran in Milwaukee. Mayor Dave gave an excellent speech, along with leaders of the Machinists union, AFL/CIO, and other labor organizers. The rally was finished off by one of Madison's greatest assets, Veterans for Peace member Will Williams.

Wisconsin heard loud and clear that our wars and our financial problems are directly related. Now, will our leaders listen? Will they bring our troops home, along with future billions of dollars? Will they fully fund the programs that help the poor, the disabled, the students, and the elderly? Or will they continue to spend billions on wars that kill and wound our own, destroy our economy, and give tax cuts to the rich? Veterans need to be on the forefront of these issues, and they were on March 19th in Madison.

Nathan Toth was in the US Navy 1999-2003 (Invasion of Afghanistan and Invasion of Iraq campaigns). He is a IVAW member and a Madison resident.

Iraq Veterans Against the War to Troops: "We Are Public Employees Too!"

IVAW

IVAW calls on all US military service members to refuse and resist any mobilization against workers organizing to protect their basic rights. IVAW stands in solidarity with the multitude gathered in Madison, Wisconsin and many other cities to defend their unions.

We believe military service members are public employees too. It is dishonorable to suggest that military personnel should be deployed against teachers, health care providers, firefighters, police officers, and other government employees, many of whom are themselves serving in the National Guard.

Workers with prior military service often seek jobs in the public sector because government agencies are the only employers that follow hiring preferences for veterans as a matter of law. According to the *Army Times*, veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are unemployed at a rate of 15.2%, higher than the national average. The picture is even worse for African American veterans who face nearly double the rate of unemployment. Protecting the rights of workers in public sector unions ensures that veterans have a chance to secure a decent job, earning a living wage and good benefits.

Madison, WI is ground zero for a fight that will likely define the relationship between public sector unions and the governments that employ them for decades to come. Similar to the federal government's defeat of the 1980 Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) strike, which signaled the beginning of a thirty-year decline of real wages, benefits, and union membership for private sector workers. What happens in Madison today is likely to affect whether governments across the country can destroy a decent standard of living for public sector workers in the future.

Governor Scott Walker recently stated that he was preparing the National Guard to respond to "labor unrest" following the introduction of union-busting legislation in Wisconsin. Governor Walker has attempted to justify this attack on collective bargaining by pointing to state budget shortfalls. Missing from this explanation is an acknowledgment that these deficits have been created and exacerbated by the ongoing trillion dollar wars and occupations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Meanwhile, federal and local governments across the US are cutting back on the public sector.

IVAW at Wisconsin State Capitol, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood

Troops have been called out in the past against worker strikes, campus protests and urban uprisings. However, recent events in Egypt and numerous examples from US history have shown that service members have the power to side with the people and refuse to use violence against their fellow citizens. Troops activated for duty in Madison, WI will have to decide if public sector workers are really the enemy. IVAW says they are not and that troops should support workers fighting for decent jobs, wages and benefits.

We know firsthand that the US military is already overextended from a decade at war. Through our Operation Recovery campaign, we have been fighting for the right of our troops to heal, rather than being involuntarily redeployed with severe physical and psychological injuries. Adding another mission to an already overburdened military for the purposes of suppressing the rights of workers is irresponsible and not worthy of our service.

Madison Solidarity Statements

In the wake of the threat posed to what remains of labor rights in Wisconsin, and the public's powerful response, two Iraqi labor leaders, Hassan Jum'a and Faleh Abood, penned solidarity statements in late February on behalf of the 26,000 member strong Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions, and the 15,000 member Worker's Front Against War and Occupation, respectively. Two of Iraq's most prominent labor organizers, both Mr. Jum'a and Mr. Abood were served with charges June of last year, in the Iraqi government's attempts to stifle their activity. As movements against repression continue to spread in the Middle East, including in Iraq, and austerity clamps down on the US, finding ways to build bridges and create concrete solidarity becomes more and more vital.

— War Resisters League

To: The US Labor Movement
Subject: Solidarity

In the name of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions representing 26,000 workers and 10 unions in the oil sector . . .

It is with great sadness that we learn that workers in Education (teachers) and Health (nurses) are having their rights violated by Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker, in a country that is seen as democratic and as "a land of the free." Preventing these sectors of society from bargaining is a clear violation of democracy.

We believe that worker's struggles all over the world are one struggle, and that these violations negatively affect relationships between workers throughout the globe. Therefore, we express our complete solidarity with our brothers in the US and strongly condemn Scott Walker's actions that amount to attacks and the autocracy of a dictator.

The oil workers and their leaders in Iraq stand with and support the teachers and nurses and all the activists in the US labor movement against these violations of their rights. We also demand that the US government take all necessary steps to prevent these violations.

In solidarity,

President of the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions
Hassan Jum'a Awad al-Asadi

Cc'ed: President Barrack Obama, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, The Leadership of the AFL-CIO, The Worker Solidarity Center, US Labor Against the War

To: The US Labor Movement
Subject: Solidarity

In the name of "Worker's Front Against War and Occupation in the South of Iraq" representing 15,000 workers, we strongly condemn the actions of Wisconsin's governor, Scott Walker. His threats have provoked our anger and disappointment at a time when we are struggling to prevent Iraqi workers being treated the same way. We stand in solidarity and full support with the teachers and nurses, and all workers in the US.

In Iraq, we workers still suffer from oppression and marginalization in the public sector, and we say to the teachers and nurses: keep pushing your demands because one day dictators and tyranny will fall away and free people will prevail. We ask the US government to take immediate steps to prevent the violation of worker's rights.

In Solidarity,
President - Workers Front Against War and Occupation
Faleh Abood Umara

Cc'ed: United States Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, Center for Global Solidarity, US Labor Against the War

IVAW Solidarity Statement with Survivors of MST

IVAW

As veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we stand in solidarity with survivors of Military Sexual Trauma (MST), which includes sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape.

Sexual abuse is an epidemic stretching across all branches of service and affects both men and women. As veterans we've experienced firsthand the attacks and abuse, degradation of survivors, and a systematic refusal by commanders to seek justice in these cases.

We find the military's blatant disregard for survivors of MST to be unacceptable and atrocious. Thousands of service members are deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, making the greatest sacrifices to carry out military duties. On top of the stress and danger of deploying to a war zone, many service members face the threat of rape, assault and harassment from within their own ranks.

We cannot as a nation ignore this morally abhorrent behavior. Survivors of MST victimized first by the perpetrator are often re-traumatized by their command and military leadership who are aware of the problem, yet allow it to persist and attack the victim for speaking up.

Those who would vilify survivors and participate in victim blaming not only demonstrate disdain for human rights, but also create the culture that allows this abuse to continue. Military leaders who choose to ignore or purposely mishandle MST cases should be considered accessories to rape.

The United States military praises service members in rhetoric and violates their human rights in reality. Service members have a right to heal. Service members must no longer tolerate being systematically abused and forced to endure some of the most horrifying conditions imaginable.

With the support of the Service Women's Action Network (SWAN), a class-action lawsuit was filed against Defense Secretary Robert Gates and his predecessor Donald Rumsfeld. We support the veterans and service members that have filed suit for mishandling of sexual assault and rape cases.

We women and men who have served stand in support of MST survivors - those who have filed suit and thousands of still remaining silent. We demand that they receive justice and that the military acts now to stop MST and other preventable abuses of service members.

We would like to thank SWAN for taking on this work with such commitment. Learn more about the lawsuit on SWAN's website.

Breaking the Betrayal of Silence: Dr. King and His Call for Nonviolence from Vietnam to Afghanistan

Brock McIntosh

The American Forces Press Service recently published a brow-raising article titled, "King Might Understand Today's War, Pentagon Lawyer Says," highlighting the remarks of the department's general counsel, Jeh C. Johnson, at the Pentagon's 26th annual tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Puzzling though it sounds, the pieces fit. Surely if it was Christmas, an article would have surfaced called, "Baby Jesus Might Understand Today's War, Pentagon Lawyer Says."

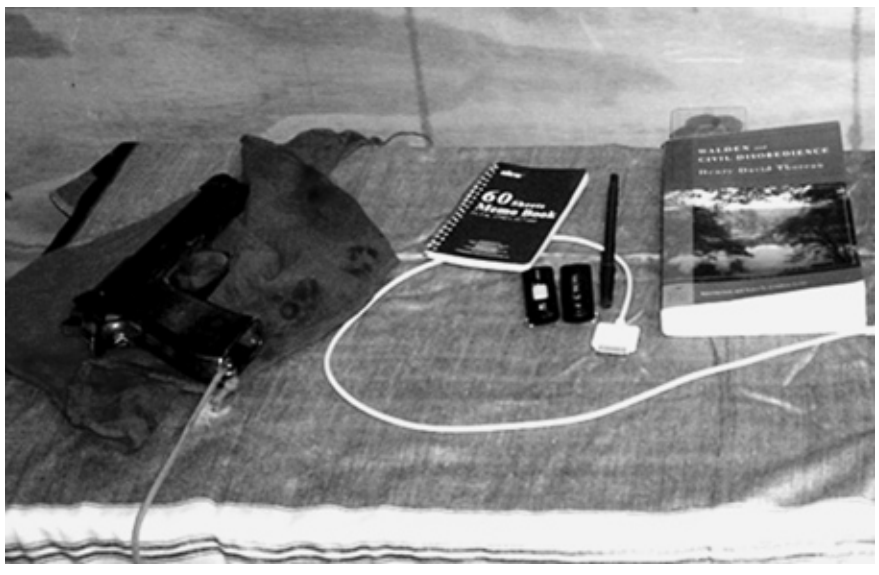
Comparing the US military to the 1968 Memphis sanitation workers, Johnson reflected, "I believe that if Dr. King were alive today, he would recognize that we live in a complicated world, and that our nation's military should not and cannot lay down its arms and leave the American people vulnerable to terrorist attack."

But King would have said that unarmed fearlessness is different from armed courage. The first principle of Kingian nonviolence states that nonviolence is a courageous way of life. But this courage derives from a readiness to confront opposing groups without violence – to refuse to give in to those terrorizing you at lunch counters or buses. After 9/11, America gave in. We swallowed the bait that al-Qaeda cast in order to lure us into a quagmire that would bankrupt our economy – like the Soviets. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq have not protected us from terrorism. They have shaped a more violent world while pillaging the US economy and slashing the sort of social programs that King struggled for throughout his lifetime.

Although Johnson compares the Afghanistan War to the Good Samaritan story, America has been on the wrong side of history in Central Asia. In the 1980's, the US government abused Afghanistan through its proxy war against the USSR, leaving the country for dead in the hands of the same ultraconservative Mujahedeen warlords running the country today, whom we are now backing. Today, we are abusing Afghanistan by using the country as a meeting ground between two forces, neither of which calls Afghanistan home: America and al-Qaeda. After recouping in safety on the sidelines of Kuwait and Kyrgyzstan, America emerges on the field of Afghanistan only to battle newly refreshed al-Qaeda and Talib soldiers from the sidelines of Pakistan. Certainly, there has been improvement in some sectors of Afghan society, but Good Samaritans don't launch drone strikes and Tomahawk missiles into Third World villages – killing civilian children – to capture a few bad guys.

So is there a nonviolent alternative? General Douglas MacArthur thought so when he said:

"In the evolution of civilization, if it is to survive, all men cannot fail eventually



to adopt Gandhi's belief that the process of mass application of force to resolve contentious issues is fundamentally not only wrong but contains within itself the germs of self-destruction."

Analyzing 67 transitions from authoritarianism since 1972, a Freedom House report concluded that 50 could be attributed to nonviolent organizing, and those that used nonviolence were more likely to remain free. These figures were released before the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings and the rest of the secular, nonviolent Arab spring, which has done more to damage al-Qaeda in two months than the US has managed since the CIA established the Bin Laden Issue Station fifteen years ago. Even the Pentagon's own RAND Corporation concedes that "military force" has about a 7 percent chance of ending terrorist organizations.

History demonstrates what Afghans can achieve without violence. The world's first nonviolent army, the Khudai Khidmatgar, was founded in 1929 by Badshah Khan, who organized nearly 100,000 Pashtuns (the Taliban's tribal-origin) to trade their arsenal of weapons for a variety of nonviolent tactics. Their work was instrumental in ousting the British occupation.

Unfortunately, Afghanistan's familiarity with Khan and strategic nonviolence is hampered by its literacy rate and availability of and access to information. To make up for the disparity, civil resistance literature is being translated into Pashto and Dari by the Albert Einstein Institute (guided by its Afghan-born director), Maria Stephan (former Manager of Educational Initiatives at the International Center for Nonviolent Conflict), and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Translations

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Our Mission Continues: IVAW Calls on Congress To Honor Its Moral Responsibilities to Iraq

T.J. Buonomo

According to Refugees International and UNHCR estimations, as many as 1.5 million Iraqis continue to subsist as refugees in neighboring countries. Approximately 500,000 of an additional 1.5 million internally displaced Iraqis are categorized as squatters with minimal access to basic public services. Congress has a responsibility to fund the foreign aid budget to support USAID, UNHCR and other organizations working to resettle these populations and help them meet their basic needs. It will take some time for the Iraqi government to develop the capacity to transition into the lead role in these efforts and the United States has both a moral obligation and a security rationale for ensuring that these gaps continue to be filled.

Members of the House of Representatives recently voted to cut the foreign aid budget as fiscal and political pressures mount to reduce the federal deficit. General Petraeus has said that this would be short-sighted. IVAW has called on Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Dan Inouye to hold the line on budget cuts to US foreign aid operations in Iraq.

IVAW also believes it is critical that the full human costs of this occupation be documented and, pending funding, intends to send a film team to Iraq in 2012 to capture the reality of the humanitarian situation there. Members of the Bush administration and their supporters in the media continue to sugarcoat the situation in Iraq in order to defend their disastrous policies, which resulted directly and indirectly in over 100,000 Iraqi deaths according to documents obtained by Wikileaks. Saddam Hussein and his sadistic sons may be gone but gratuitous torture continues to be perpetrated by elite security forces under the direct authority of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. While the current Iraqi government may not intend to rebuild Saddam's weapons programs, the Bush administration did more to incite terrorism against American citizens by invading Iraq than any propaganda Al Qaeda might have concocted on its own.

The United States must fulfill its moral responsibilities in Iraq and the American public must hold accountable members of Congress who disregard these obligations. IVAW and VVAW can play a critical role in accomplishing this by reminding Americans that whether or not our troops are engaged in headline-catching combat operations, we cannot forget the past or the present situation in Iraq and the burden of responsibility it places on us as a nation.

T.J. Buonomo is a member of the Board of Directors of Iraq Veterans Against the War and Chair of IVAW's Reparations Committee. He is a former Military Intelligence Officer and graduate of the US Air Force Academy.

T. J. Buonomo

Breaking the Betrayal of Silence

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include *From Dictatorship to Democracy, A Force More Powerful,* and the comic book, *The Montgomery Story*. Still, given the country's literacy rate and lack of access to internet and libraries, educational CD's and DVD's are alternatives that must be explored. Under Taliban rule, widespread underground Titanic-viewing-parties tapped the Afghan desire for civil resistance. This urge would be exponentially-more fulfilled through watching King or Gandhi, rather than Leonardo DiCaprio. Afghan university classes and programs would also be useful means for spreading nonviolence, as well as workshop and trainings led by Afghans touring cities and the countryside.

Progress is slow. The obstacles are daunting. But groups like the Awakened Youth of Afghanistan and the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers are energized and growing – and the youth are both the majority and the future of Afghanistan.

Specialist Brock McIntosh first read Henry David Thoreau's "Essay on Civil Disobedience" in Afghanistan while cleaning his 9mm pistol on a table built by KBR. Like Martin Luther King, McIntosh's pilgrimage to nonviolence was triggered by Thoreau. McIntosh is still in the service but currently applying for conscientious objector status.

11.11

I wept at my wedding which was two weeks before I left for Vietnam

I wept when my grandfather died when I was in Vietnam and I wasn't allowed to go home for his funeral

I wept when I saw so many abandoned children in a DaNang orphange... most of them fathered by American soldiers

I wept when I returned home

I wept when my son was born

I wept when I saw Picasso's Guernica

I wept when my best friend told me he had cancer

I wept when the World Trade Center collapsed

I wept when I walked into the Louvre for the first time

I wept when we invaded Iraq

I wept after seeing Fahrenheit 9/11

I wept at my son's wedding

I always weep when the national anthem is played at the Olympics

I always weep at the Vietnam Memorial

I always weep on Veterans Day

— *Michael Nelson*

IVAW Field Organizing

Aaron Hughes

The first time I visited Ft. Hood was Memorial Day weekend of 2008. It was shortly after Winter Soldier, which had helped lead to the formation of the new active duty chapter there. On that first visit in the heat of summer in Texas I found myself feeling deeply connected to the members and their very real and immediate struggles in this place of deployments, re-deployments, multiple deployments, cigarettes, fast food, painkillers, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, dreams, uniforms, red eyes, sunrise, paper work, heat, waiting, standing, and questioning.

Questioning is often what concludes my thoughts about this space and drives me to return to dig deeper into the organizing work. These questions have brought me back to Ft. Hood and Under the Hood Café for short two to three week organizing stints multiple times since the beginning of my work as the field organizing team leader in 2009.

On a recent stint in January and February of this year, the previous visits and long distant phone calls really began to pay off. Kyle, the Ft. Hood IVAW chapter leader and recent Conscientious Objector, and I worked together on an outreach campaign on base. Having developed a relationship from previous visits and conference calls we were able dive right into the outreach. We talked to the soldiers daily coming in and out of the PX on post about the Operation Recovery Campaign to end the continued occupations and win service members' the right to heal by stopping the deployment of traumatized troops.

The soldiers' responses were positive – in fact, they wanted to know more about their rights and what they could do to prevent their own deployment while dealing with trauma or the deployment of their fellow soldiers.

Over the course of two weeks we collected over 300 active duty and military family pledges to Operation Recovery, over those two weeks the friendship between organizers grew deeper as we worked side by side. Kyle's confidence in his leadership and his ideas for future actions were strengthened by our success in outreach. Fort Hood and the leaders that have grown and continue to grow up out of this base town will be an integral part of our struggle for years to come.

Every day this work seems to get deeper and deeper. The struggle to bring my brothers and sisters home has transformed into an entire way of seeing, being, living and loving. This struggle has slowly shifted from symbolic and creative gestures to the slow patient listening, learning and relationship building that is the radical transformation in society we are struggling for.

Jane Stembridge of SNCC said in 1960:

Finally it all boils down to human relationships …

It is the question of …

Whether I shall go living in isolation or whether there shall be a "we" …

Aaron Hughes in Madison, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood

Love alone is radical. Political statements are not; programs are not; even going to jail is not …

This is a lesson the field organizers have learned and continue to learn. Working through our transformative organizing model, we have slowly pealed back layer upon layer of our socially constructed, military constructed community and selves to reveal our vulnerability. It is in this vulnerability, amongst the fears and anxieties of trauma, that we do most of our organizing. By recognizing our own trauma and building relationships around each of our struggles, the organizing has gotten deeper, more sophisticated and more honest. This vulnerability and the closeness that follows when trust is built transform our trauma into empowerment. We can see this power growing now at Fort Hood and it will continue to grow as we build the campaign out of the experiences and struggles of the soldiers there.

"We" are winning.

Aaron Hughes is the Field Organizing Team Leader for Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Where to Be Inspired

Mark Strudas

We walked down the stairs and formed up in a column of two. Shoulder to shoulder we waited as the drum corps stepped in front of us. The crowd of people in our path parted like the Red Sea. The drums started rapping like machine gun fire. As we approached the rotunda, the crowd of thousands erupted with applause, cheers, and chants: "Thank You! Thank You! Thank You!" We took a moment to soak in the energy of the crowd.

A friend of mine, Todd Dennis (USN), was handed the microphone. "Hello everybody, my name is Todd, and I'm from Madison. I brought a bunch of my friends from Iraq Veterans Against the War." The cheering intensified and the volume was almost deafening. I never expected this level of support from a red state, but these red state workers held signs that said; "Stop the War on Workers," "War on Teachers," "War on Unions," "War on the Middle Class."

Before we walked in the door the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were like two giant elephants in the room that no one was willing to look at. I suppose it's a little taboo, especially in a mid-western state to criticize the war. As if addressing the subject would disgrace the American forces. But … it's not, and we're surely not bashful.

My brother, Vince Emanuele (USMC), put it best,"I think the time has long passed that we talk about these issues as if they were separate. There is nothing separate about spending $1,000,000,000,000 a year, on the military, to send us to wars that we never should have been to in the first place, when that money should have been right here. The workers here, the unions, the human rights groups, the minority groups, the anti-war groups, they have to work together. This fight does no stop tomorrow. This fight goes on forever…" As we left the rotunda, children, college students, mothers, firemen, and police officers all went out of their way to give us hugs and handshakes, high-fives and thanks. I knew then that I had justification for my actions. We were doing what was really good for the people.

Mark J Strudas was born and raised in Chesterton, IN. USMC 2003-2007. 0481 Landing Support Specialist. OIF/OEF Al Taqaddum in the Al Anbar province of Iraq, August 04-March 05 and August 05-March 06. Separated in 2007. member of NW Indiana IVAW.

Central Illinois IVAW: Back in the Struggle

Jacob Crawford, Scott Kimball and Sarah Lazare

As we enter into the tenth year of the war in Afghanistan and the 9th year of the war in Iraq, we are seeing the persistence of a movement to counter these wars. Showing our presence in schools, community centers, union halls, workplaces and military bases throughout the United States. The anti-war movement is resuscitating itself, recognizing the need for grassroots organizing at the local level. The Central Illinois Iraq Veterans Against the War would like to share the story of our own chapter's reactivation and local organizing in the heartland.

With an influx of new members and allies, this fall marked the revitalization of the Central Illinois IVAW chapter. Old members who had been inactive since the election of President Obama, along with new blood, decided to re-start local efforts to build a veteran and ally community against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We started with simple outreach on campus at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana, setting up a table on the quad and passing out literature while asking people what they thought about the occupations. Through this physical presence, we met students, faculty, workers, and veterans, many of whom shared our concerns about the wars. We were able to raise awareness as well as recruit new IVAW members and ally activists. We also built relationships with organizations such as the Graduate Employee Organization, the labor union that represents graduate students on campus, who played an instrumental role in helping us get the resources we needed for our tabling efforts.

Later in the fall, we organized an outreach event to bring attention to military suicides. On Veterans Day, we hung a large banner the size of a bed with one tally mark for every US Army soldier that took his/her own life in 2009. This artistic spectacle captured the attention of students and faculty alike. The chilling image representing our brothers and sisters we have lost to suicide connected the passers by to this epidemic we know all too well.

We coupled this local work with increasing involvement in the national Operation Recovery Campaign which demands an end to the cruel and inhumane practice of redeploying traumatized troops before they are fully healed from Military Sexual Trauma (MST), Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) and other wounds. In November, several Central Illinois IVAW members and allies traveled to Fort Campbell, Kentucky to support Jeff Hanks, an active duty soldier being forced to redeploy to Afghanistan despite severe PTSD sustained during his previous deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan. Local members met with Hanks to find out what we could do to support his fight to protect his right to heal. We returned in January to follow up with Hanks after learning that he was scheduled for redeployment, despite the public outcry about mistreatment he was facing at the hands of the military. IVAW members and allies hand-delivered a legal notice to several commanding officers at the base, informing them that, through the help of his lawyer, Hanks was seeking redress for wrongdoing. Most importantly, we met with Hanks' family, built relationships, and learned about what they were struggling with. Hanks ended up not deploying, but we know that for every Jeff Hanks who goes public, there are countless others who ship off with profound wounds, a practice that underlies the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Jacob Crawford in Madison, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

Our work on the national Operation Recovery campaign also included participation in national strategy meetings, spaces that are vital for building community and determining the course of our efforts. In January, about 40 veterans and allies from around the country converged at Coffee Strong, the GI Coffee House just outside of Fort Lewis, Washington, to hatch plans for the coming roll-out of the campaign. It was incredibly powerful to be face-to-face with others from around the country doing local work integrated into a national campaign to take on the military.

To bring the campaign back to our community in Champaign-Urbana, we hosted a speakers' panel on military suicides, MST, PTSD, and TBI, highlighting the testimony of IVAW members, VVAW members, foreign policy analysts, and mental health professionals. Hans Buwalda, mental healthcare professional, explained that it is inhumane to redeploy traumatized troops back into the war zone responsible for their trauma, a practice that runs rampant in today's military. Champaign-Urbana and Chicago IVAW members shared their personal experiences with trauma within the military and the challenges of dealing with traumatic experiences after transitioning back to civilian life. Joe Miller, a VVAW national coordinator, explained that it was Vietnam veteran organizing that put the issue of PTSD on the map, not the benevolence of the Department of Veteran Af-

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Members of Central Illinois IVAW on Univeristy of Illinois Quad.

Central Illinois IVAW

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fairs. This panel offered a space for sharing personal stories, while providing a systemic analysis about the root causes of perpetual war and trauma. We were also able to meet community members who are interested in supporting our future work.

Soon after, the Wisconsin and Midwestern protests to protect public workers rights catalyzed regional IVAW mobilization in support of Wisconsin workers. As we have been organizing to stop the wars abroad, a war was brought to us at home. After Wisconsin Governor Scott Walker pushed the Budget Repair bill that sought to strip public sector unions of the right to collectively bargain, IVAW chapters from all over the country came to protest the legislation and stand in solidarity with the unions, including members from our chapter. We insisted that we are public workers too, and the Wisconsin National Guard should refuse and resist any mobilization orders against workers fighting for their rights. Two weeks later, the Madison IVAW chapter organized an anti-war rally on the Wisconsin capitol grounds for the 8th anniversary of the invasion of Iraq. The rally started with scores of IVAW members marching slowly toward the capitol building with a larger contingent of Veterans For Peace Marching behind them. Halfway into the march the Wisconsin firefighters' union bagpipes band joined with IVAW and marched with us to the capitol . Machinists, teachers, students, construction workers, and many other workers marched with us as we demanded an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. At the capitol, IVAW was accompanied by labor in our call to end the wars abroad as well as the war against the workers at home.

In this past year, we have learned the importance of building local community and membership, coordinated across different regions and intersecting issues. It was our self-organizing as a community of veterans and allies that allowed us to build the strength of our movement. This not only allowed us to make strides in our own efforts to end the wars, but it also empowered us to act in solidarity with other communities fighting for their rights. By standing with labor in Wisconsin, we have reached a vital turning point in the anti-war movement, bringing union and anti-war activists together to connect the dots between the erosion of workers' rights and public goods at home and endless and unjust wars abroad. Furthermore, through our local participation in the national Operation Recovery campaign, we also stand in solidarity with the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, for without the redeployment of traumatized troops, these unjust wars could not continue. We have come to the realization that as our community grows so does our power. We are hopeful that these examples of local building can continue to grow and web together, forming a movement strong enough to take on the forces we are up against.

Jacob Crawford and Scott Kimball are organizers with the Central Illinois chapter of IVAW. Sarah Lazare is an organizer with the Civilian-Soldier Alliance.

Scott Kimball in Madison, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

IVAW in Madison, March 19, 2011. Photo by Andie Wood.

Inspiration and Tips to Stay in the Struggle

Maggie Martin

No one knows more than our brothers and sisters who have been resisting and dissenting since Vietnam that this struggle can be exhausting. Thinking about the past few months of work on IVAW's Operation Recovery media messaging team as well as other responsibilities with Warrior Writers, grad school and local organizing I feel worn out just thinking about it. Sometimes it is hard to keep on pushing but there are inspiring events happening right in our midst and some practical ways for us to keep ourselves fit to fight for justice.

Times like our face-to-face meeting at Coffee Strong, in January 2011 where IVAW campaign organizers worked nonstop through a weekend of sharing our work and planning for the future. IVAW members in Seattle, like Andrew Vandenbergh and Jorge Zapatista along with other Northwestern members and volunteers were awesome hosts. Ft. Lewis chapter member Nicole Mitchell shared original songs about her experiences as a soldier and CivSol member Siri Margerin photographed the whole weekend, just to name a couple highlights.

We've had times like March 19th when Midwestern IVAW members joined up to stand in solidarity with the people and the workers of Wisconsin. Long time IVAW member Todd Dennis put in hours upon hours of work and hosted dedicated organizers like Aaron Hughes, Vincent Emanuele and Barry Romo weekend after weekend. The Madison chapter has demonstrated the type of commitment and longevity that IVAW needs, they even inspired founding member Kelly Daugherty and her husband Jay to drive all the way from Denver to Madison to stand in solidarity.

These are the times when I know that the struggle is worth it; when I can see my brothers and sisters alongside me. The times in between however, are hard, and isolating, and nearly overwhelming. So what can we do to fight burnout? Community building and self-care are essential.

Community building means that we are learning not just to do work together but develop personal relationships. We need to learn to take the time with each other to connect in order to sustain and lift up our community. Work on your listening skills and try to build trust relationships, you may find that nurturing your relationships will make them even more valuable in your life. We also need to learn to express our values and our appreciation for one another. When we talk about values we realize that we have connections that run deeper than politics and dogma. Likewise, when we express our appreciation for each other we realize that there is so much to appreciate in our community and we encourage those who are doing good work.

We also need to make sure we are practicing self-care. We live in a crazy world that is totally self-centered but at the same time rejects self-reflection. Many of us come from military backgrounds and cultures where we were forced to ignore our own well-being and we carry that with us into this work. Not only do we hurt ourselves when we neglect our own needs but we make it impossible to help others. If we are to make a positive impact we must keep ourselves physically and mentally fit. Take the time to do the things that give you balance; get exercise, plenty of rest, and take the time to prepare healthy and delicious meals. Do the things that give you pleasure yoga, hiking or playing music are all good ways to balance the stress of organizing.

As we continue in the struggle for a more just world it is important for us to reflect on our struggles and find ways to get better and do better. Getting involved with local and national organizing where you can create community is a great way to heal, find meaning in your life, and give back; the work however can be exhausting and isolating. Because it is such trying and such important work I wanted to share some of what I have learned over the past few years as a member and volunteer for IVAW. I implore my sisters and brothers in the struggle; love, respect and encourage each other, take the time to listen and connect with each other, and care for yourself so that you can have balance and help others find it too.

Maggie Martin is a volunteer organizer for IVAW and Warrior Writers. She is a team leader for the campaign Operation Recovery. Maggie is currently organizing to start a Michigan IVAW chapter. Maggie is working towards a Master's Degree in Social Justice at Marygrove College in Detroit, Michigan.

Operation Exposure: IVAW and Justseeds Collaborate on a Street Art Campaign

NICOLAS LAMPERT

On November 15, 2010 in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago a dozen or so artists from the Justseeds Artists' Cooperative met up with an equal number of veterans and supporters from Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and split into teams. The plan was simple. Divide up posters that Justseeds had designed for IVAW and then wheat paste the city. Hit the advertising spaces with messages of GI resistance and "Operation Recovery" – the IVAW campaign meant to stop the redeployment of traumatized soldiers. Target the city landscape and it's psyche. Use street art to focus public attention towards the issues not being discussed - GI Resistance, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), sexual assault of women in the military and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). Cover up the corporate ads that pollute the city and get the public talking about GI resistance, GI rights and stopping the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Aaron Hughes of IVAW framed the parameters for the project. He sent Justseeds (a decentralized artists collective consisting of 26 members from the US, Canada and Mexico) information about the campaign months in advance so that Justseeds artists could each create a design and print 30-50 copies before traveling to Chicago for the annual Justseeds retreat. At the same time, the Chicago branch of IVAW worked with Nicolas Lampert and Colin Matthes of Justseeds to cut out large stencil portraits of three soldiers who had resisted the US military. One stencil honored Camilo Mejia—a Florida National Guard Sergeant who became the first US combat veteran to publicly refuse to redeploy back to Iraq. Mejia had witnessed detainees being tortured and abused by US troops in Iraq. He served nine months in prison for desertion. In August 2007 he was elected Chair of Iraq Veterans Against the War. Another stencil honored Suzanne Swift – a 23-year-old Army SPC who was continually sexually harassed and assaulted by three men in her command while she served in Iraq. She suffered from PTSD and went AWOL in January 2006 to resist redeploying with the same unit. She was apprehended and imprisoned briefly in January 2007 and is now active in anti-war and anti-rape campaigns. The last stencil honored Rodney Watson —a 29-year-old Army Specialist who served 12-months in Iraq. Watson refused redeployment and is currently seeking refuge near Vancouver, Canada. A quote from Watson, attached to the stencil, read in part, "I'd rather do my time in jail than be a party to the racism I saw in Iraq. As an African-American, I grew up with racism. But in Iraq, I saw the same kind of abuse and mistreatment, only this was US enlisted soldiers and American contractors, like security forces, abusing Iraqis."

On the morning following Veterans Day both the posters and the stencils were plastered throughout Chicago. Crews targeted billboard ad spaces and boarded-up buildings, spaces that are constantly wheat pasted in advertisement posters – an insidious practice where even the few spaces available to the street artists and the restful eye becomes a site for marketing. Both Justseeds and IVAW knew that their handiwork would not last long, as the trolls who wheat paste ads work 24-7. Additionally the city is infamous for covering up street art with brown paint. However, it was the poetics that mattered. Covering up ads challenged consumerism and the corporate culture that perpetuates systems of inequality and oppression -- systems that create public apathy to war. Despite much of the street art being covered up or torn down, the action caught the attention of thousands around the world as the photo documentation that IVAW and Justseeds took was spread through street art and activists blogs and websites. In essence, the street art served as a tactical media intervention.

Photo by Nicolas Lampert.

Photo by Nicolas Lampert.

However, the project did more than just enter the media bloodstream. It built relationships and helped energize a movement and its participants. Nicole Baltrushes, Civilian Soldier Alliance member, was enthralled by the guerilla action, and commented, "Wheat pasting these strong messages of resistance in aesthetically provoking posters over the dull and repetitive advertisements was inspiring and transformational. Later seeing all sorts of passersby standing and staring at our installations made me realize the breadth of people that can be reached with meaningful street art." Aaron Hughes adds "Collaboration is key to growing our movement and connecting the issues. The more ways we are able to collaborate, the more ways we are able to engage communities, inspire communities and build communities strong enough to take on the largest industry in the world, the military industrial complex."

The street art action also served as the start of a series of collaborations between IVAW and Justseeds. Following the November 15th action, an exhibition along with a new mural about GI resistance was installed at the In These Times Building in Chicago. Print exhibitions have also traveled to Fort Hood, Philadelphia, Lawrence, Kansas and Milwaukee. In each case, the print show coincided with readings from the IVAW Warrior Writers project. Future projects (additional murals and a portfolio of the prints) are also being discussed.

These creative efforts from street art to poetry to murals have proved to be an effective medium for reaching new audiences and drawing attention back to the goals of the Operation Recovery campaign. The art was also about the issues. IVAW writes, "We recognize that we must stop the deployment of all soldiers in order to end these occupations. We see the deployment of soldiers with Traumatic Brain Injuries, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and military sexual trauma as particularly cruel, dangerous, and inhumane. Military commanders across all branches are pushing service members far past human limits for the sake of combat readiness. We cannot allow those commanders to ignore the welfare of their troops. From multiple deployments despite PTSD, TBI, and other injuries, to rampant sexual assault within the military, soldiers are consistently being denied their right to heal. This basic right is being denied and we must organize to get it back."

NICOLAS LAMPERT IS A MILWAUKEE/ CHICAGO BASED INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST AND AUTHOR. COLLECTIVELY, HE WORKS WITH THE JUSTSEEDS ARTIST'S COOPERATIVE (WWW. JUSTSEEDS.ORG). HIS ARTIST WEBSITE IS: WWW.MACHINEANIMALCOLLAGES.COM

Celebrating 30 Years of Art Created by Veterans

Robin Hoecker

An artist at his core, Joe Fornelli created many pieces throughout his tour in Vietnam in 1965-66. He used whatever he could find, painting on scraps of paper with C-ration coffee, drawing with map ink, or using a bayonet to carve a piece of teak wood that he recovered from an exploded building.

At first, he did not show the pieces to anyone.

"No one talked about Vietnam after the war," said Fornelli. But after years of what he saw as a collective amnesia about the conflict, he decided he was ready to show his creations to the world.

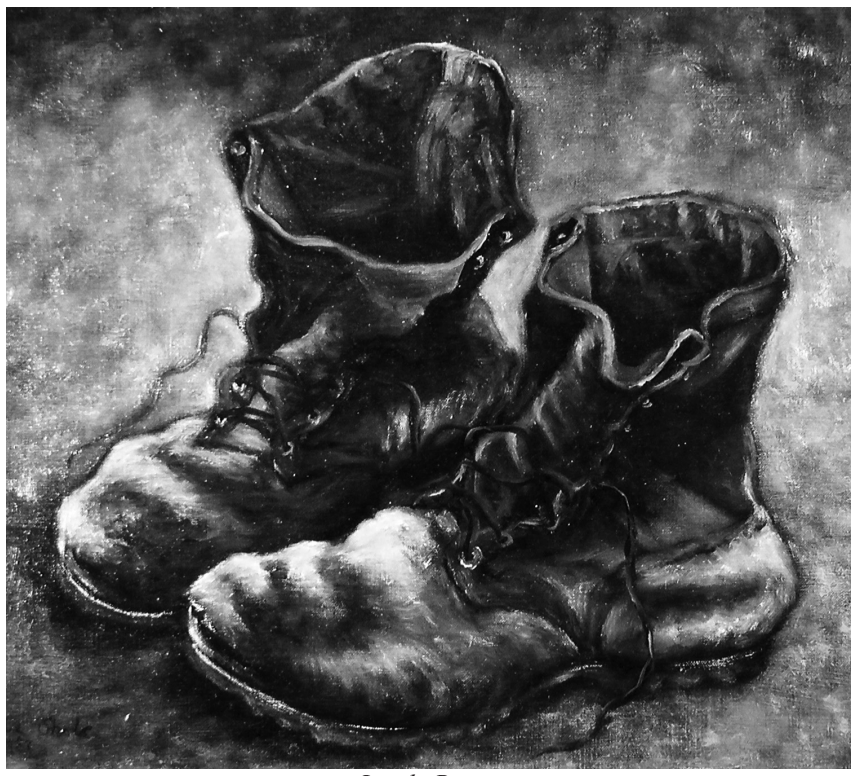
"It wasn't the war, it was the forgetting that bothered me," said Fornelli. "I wanted to shed truth and light on what it meant to be a Vietnam vet. Art is my language. It communicates more than any of us could say with words." In 1981, he and a handful of other veterans formed the Vietnam Veterans Art Group and displayed their artwork in a small Chicago gallery.

2011 marks the 30th anniversary of the original exhibit, which eventually evolved into the more permanent National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, located in Chicago's South Loop neighborhood. Over the years, the museum has expanded in both size and concept. What began as a small group of veterans displaying their artwork, the collection now contains more than 1,400 pieces, created by 255 artists.

In 2010, the museum dropped the word "Vietnam" from the name, marking the inclusion of works from veterans of all US wars. The collection now contains pieces made by Iraq and Afghanistan vets. On Memorial Day 2011, the museum will unveil "Angel in the Desert," by Erik Anderson. It will be the first time the museum has displayed art created by a veteran of the Persian Gulf War.

"It's not like going to Disneyland, but this is an important part of American history," said Fornelli, who volunteers at the museum several days a week. He said he still receives calls, letters and artwork from veterans and their families. In March, someone left a 2-foot tall metal sculpture at the elevator, with a scribbled note about the piece and its creators, a pair of Vietnam vets. "Thirty years later, they're still making this stuff."

The collection is important for the artists as well as the viewers for different reasons. "It is a way for people to express themselves, as well as a way for others to understand what the veterans went through," said museum visitor Nicole Nelson, 26. "My dad served in Vietnam but he never talked about it. I came to the museum to get a better understanding of the war. The art makes the war about people, not about politics."



Jungle Boots

Despite the popularity of the museum and the treasures it contains, the future of the NVAM remains uncertain. The museum's building lease expires in 2012, leaving the museum to look for a new location

"We want to secure a new home to ensure that our local patrons can continue to enjoy our collection," said Levi Moore, Executive Director of the museum. "And we want to improve our web presence to reach out to our national and international supporters."

Information about the artwork, artists and ways to donate are available on the museum website: www.nvam.org.

Robin Hoecker is a former reporter/photographer at Stars and Stripes newspaper. She is a Ph.D. student in Media, Technology and Society at Northwestern University. She currently volunteers at the National Veterans Art Museum through the university's Center for Civic Engagement.

Goodbye Vietnam. Watercolor from 1983 by David Sessions.

The Importance of Remembering

Derek Griffin

The topic of discussion today is the importance of remembering and taking care of America's veterans. Veterans are asked, either implicitly or explicitly, to fight and die in our name. There are serious, far-reaching consequences that go with such a request. As former US diplomat Joseph Wilson once said, "There is no more solemn decision that a society can make than sending its soldiers off to die and to kill for country." The solemnity that Mr. Wilson speaks of is the very reason we must remember our veterans. Taking care of them is simply the reciprocation of this agreement. Despite evidence to the contrary, service to one's nation is not a one-sided contract. Service members enlist under the assumption that upon the completion of their service, the nation will return the favor, so-to-speak.

This has not always been the case. The darkest moment in US domestic history was the Bonus March of 1932. This forgotten moment in history was marked by a violent attack upon unemployed veterans of World War I who were petitioning Washington for desperately needed financial assistance to which they were entitled. We, as Americans, must remember our veterans because in 1932 we almost completely severed the bond between civilian and veteran. The Bonus March set the precedent of disregarding the special status veterans enjoy. There can be no more deplorable an act than to attack those who sacrificed so completely for our nation. While support for our nation's vets should be so overwhelmingly obvious that it need not be said, history is filled with moments, such as the Bonus March, where we lost our way. Today we are again losing our way.

I came to this regrettable conclusion a few weeks ago after reading an article entitled "Afghanistan: Does Anyone in the US Still Care?" The article was about the war in Afghanistan as it enters its tenth year of US commitment. Now the longest war in US history, the article followed media reporters as they scoured the local Washington DC area for newsworthy stories commemorating such a woeful anniversary. The pickings were slim but a few reporters made it out to Walter Reed Army Medical Center to cover a demonstration held by veterans of the Global War on Terror protesting current defense policies that send wounded and heavily medicated troops back to the front lines. Their campaign was called Operation Recovery and its message was simple: stop deploying military personnel who have been identified as suffering some form of trauma…they have a right to heal. The young vets were protesting this policy in response to recently leaked stories of US soldiers killing innocent Afghans for sport. Ethan McCord, one of about fifteen veterans gathered, said:

"This is what happens to traumatized soldiers that have gone on multiple deployments and we send them to Afghanistan into the same environment that traumatized them to begin with and you place them on psychotropic drugs and then you hand them a weapon and turn them loose on the streets. What do you expect will happen?"

This was not the first time Mr. McCord had been before the peering cameras of the media. He was recently the center of controversy after being captured on video trying to pull two children out of a smoldering van that had just been attacked by US helicopters in Iraq. The video was leaked by now infamous Wikileaks. While the corporate news networks have framed the leaking of this video as a gross breach of state security, others believe it falls under whistleblower protection statutes. Wherever you may fall in this debate, one thing is clear: Ethan McCord speaks from experience and has earned every iota of credibility one could garner him. If we are to remember our veterans and take care of them when they get home, our first task is to listen to what they are telling us.

The aforementioned article was published last month. Since this article, many other poignant articles have been published that are equally critical of the ways in which we remember and take care of our troops and veterans.

In an article published on October 16th in the *New York Times* and titled After Service, Veteran Deaths Surge, author Aaron Glantz exposed an issue that is all too familiar to the veteran community: That is, there seems to be an inordinately high rate of veteran suicides and other premature deaths among our current crop of combat vets. A study of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans from the state of California revealed that veterans have been dying at a rate three times higher than those killed in combat. California suicide data showed that Iraq and Afghanistan veterans were two and a half times more likely to kill themselves than Californians of the same age groups without military service. These veterans were also twice as likely to die in a car accident and five and a half times more likely to die in a motorcycle accident. These statistics are consistent with Department of Veterans Affairs' figures that report between 1,000 to 2,000 young veterans attempt suicide each month.

Unfortunately, we have not learned from the Vietnam generation. It is not widely known, but more Vietnam veterans died from suicide upon their return home than from combat overseas. It pains me to see this young generation of vets reading from the same sad script as their predecessors. The military will spend millions of dollars transforming recruits into warriors but not enough transforming them back into civilians. We are never taught how to live with the burdens of being a veteran. If we are to truly remember our veterans and take care of their needs, we must first invest in those programs that ease their burdens.

Economic uncertainty or not, veteran care can be funded if we are serious about it. For instance, we created trillions of dollars out of thin air to fund these perpetual wars. If that is the case, we can surely do the same for veteran care. Moreover, if defense contractors can make exorbitant amounts of money by overcharging the government, a war profiteer tax should be instituted to fund the long-term care of our returning veterans. While these may not be politically viable suggestions, we can all agree that they are morally viable.

Three days after the

continued on next page

Kansas City.

The Importance of Remembering

continued from previous page

publication of Aaron Glantz's report on California veteran deaths, Tony Norman of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* wrote a scathing indictment of American indifference to the wars and the toll they are taking on the less than one percent of the population that fights in them. The title of the story was "War Rages, Soldiers Suffer, America Sleeps." He claimed in the article that Americans are morally disconnected from the policies enacted in their name and carried out by our armed forces. I must agree with Mr. Norman that there are some glaring facts that paint America as a nation that wears its patriotism on its sleeve all the while ignoring anything that might make us feel guilty about the actual state of America's former fighting men and women. For example, unemployment among returning veterans is twice the national average. Returning veterans are also becoming homeless much quicker than those of the Vietnam generation. Roughly 13% of America's entire homeless population is comprised of vets. In fact, female vets are four times more likely to end up homeless than the population at large. As Mr. Norman candidly pointed out, "That there is a single homeless soldier should provoke national outrage, but it doesn't because these vets and the wars they fight are invisible." While the tone of Mr. Norman's story may turn some people off, the facts are still disconcerting and need to be earnestly addressed.

The last of the articles I am presenting was published three days after Mr. Norman's diatribe. Bob Herbert, columnist for the *New York Times*, in his op-ed entitled "The Way We Treat Our Troops," took a slightly different angle. His assertion was that an all volunteer force is undemocratic. Democracies are based on majoritarian rule yet the very few predominate national service while the remaining ninety-nine percent have the option of living their lives completely oblivious to those who fight in their name. Mr. Herbert would bring back the draft and is quite explicit about that. He is sick and tired of reading about cases like Sergeant First Class Lance Vogeler, a 29-year-old soldier who was killed in action a few weeks ago after surviving twelve previous deployments. SFC Vogeler had a wife, two kids and one on the way. One must wonder if his kids will even remember a man who served four deployments in Iraq and eight in Afghanistan.

There is something intrinsically wrong with asking our already exhausted and overextended service members to fight these wars in perpetuity while we go about our daily lives unaffected. Americans can throw yellow ribbon magnets on their cars, wear American flag t-shirts, and sing patriotic country music songs until their heart is content; the fact of the matter is that these things are of little consequence. None of them require any amount of sacrifice. After September 11th we were not asked to sacrifice by our leaders. Instead, we were encouraged to go shopping. I do not want to paint all Americans as apathetic and consumeristic but how many of us, besides the veterans and their families, have endured hardships for these wars? We either fight as a nation or do not fight at all.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are not living in the 1940's anymore. The rich are no longer taxed at a 90% tax bracket to finance our wars. For all the renewed vigor about tax rates, Americans, especially rich Americans, are not taxed enough… sometimes not at all. In fact, with deficit spending and supplemental funding bills, Americans get their wars without having the unpleasant task of having to figure out a way to pay for them. I am sure our grandchildren can figure out how to pay down the three to five trillion dollars these wars will ultimately cost when life-long care for disabled veterans is factored into the final total.

Americans of the "Greatest Generation" did not plaster "Support the Troops" stickers all over the public square because they were asked to sacrifice and were only too grateful to do so. Indeed, America in the 1940's did not believe in empty gestures like shopping trips. In fact, during the 1940's shopping trips would have been impossible as many durable goods went out of production so that those raw materials could go towards the war effort. Not being able to purchase an iPhone or even a car because of our current wars is probably unfathomable for today's America. Yesteryear's America was more concerned with creating national unity and enacting programs of support that actually helped. Conscription, victory gardens, war bonds, and rationing, for example, not only helped the war effort, but created an unspoken bond between those being fought for at home and those doing the fighting abroad. We need to reinvigorate that bond.

That said, we just experienced an election cycle where nearly all candidates avoided issues such as veteran care and the wars like the plague. Sure, the economy is a pressing issue but are we really so naïve to think that the wars and the economy are mutually exclusive? As I see it, the only way to bring these issues back to the forefront is either by significantly raising taxes (especially on the wealthiest) and/or reinstating the draft. Without these, the status quo shall remain. Americans will remain willfully ignorant of what is happening to our heroes until it affects them personally. Whatever course we take, we have a moral, civic, and economic responsibility to our veterans yet, as the evidence shows, have allowed entirely too many to slip through the cracks.

In summation, we may be losing our way, but we are not lost. I am confident we can restore the relationship between citizen and soldier by making our remembrance and care of veterans the example by which other nations emulate. However, this lofty goal can only be attained when we realize that support means nothing without sacrifice. Furthermore, it is also unattainable if we ignore vets and their plight because we have not been personally inconvenienced by foreign policy. If the words "Sacrifice for our Troops" graced yellow ribbons, I would not be criticizing America's commitment to veterans. Instead, we hide behind these mere symbols of support as if to ward off potential challenges to our patriotism. This is disingenuous and I think Americans are better than this. Deep down, all of us know that support must mean sacrifice and open ears, not yellow ribbons.

Derek Giffin, a soldier who was in Baghdad in 2004/05 and who is a member of IVAW, presented this speech to the annual Veteran's Day celebration last November (2010) at Purdue University North Central in Westville, IN.

Veterans and GIs Organizing at Fort Hood

SIRI MARGERIN

Fort Hood, Texas – The buses are heading to the airport again. They are carrying members of the First Cavalry Division off to the start of a new deployment in either Iraq or Afghanistan, making it their 4th deployment since 2003. For many of the individual soldiers, this makes their 3rd or 4th deployment or more in the War on Terror.

As the buses roll by, a small cluster of veterans and active duty service members stand outside, passing out information and starting conversations with passersby. These folks are part of a new stage in Iraq Veterans Against the War's Operation Recovery campaign and have come to Ft. Hood to do outreach with soldiers on base.

"This kind of outreach is the hardest thing to do," one of the IVAW members said, "It's really difficult to ask these loaded questions of strangers. But, it's exciting too! This is where we build real empowerment and change. How many of these folks don't realize that they have the right to ask for better treatment, now, while they are still in service and being deployed."

Yesterday afternoon the temperature dropped to below freezing. A young specialist and his wife stopped by to listen to IVAW members make their case:

"Are you interested in making a pledge to help stop the deployment of traumatized troops? Right now approximately 20% of the soldiers deploying are dealing with some combination of MST, PTSD, and/or TBI. Are you familiar with these issues? "Yeah I am . . . I know two guys deploying with me tonight who are dealing with PTSD." "Are they receiving help?" "Well...the command has other priorities..."

The overwhelming majority of those asked are unfazed by the questions: yes, they reply,something should be done.

People on base are all-too-familiar with the consequences of trauma. Last year, there were 22 confirmed suicides at Ft Hood - twice as many as 2009. The base has been experiencing an epidemic of suicides: during one tragic weekend in September of 2010, four soldiers took their own lives. 2011 has not started off any differently: on January 13th, a veteran of the 1st Cavalry named Justin Languis went out to the division's Operation Iraqi Freedom Memorial and (apparently) shot and killed himself. His wife remains an active duty soldier at Ft. Hood.

The suicides are only the tip of the iceberg. Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) are widespread, but grossly under reported. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is more routinely diagnosed, but treated either ineffectively or not at all. The wounds from these traumas are wreaking havoc in the lives of soldiers, their families and their communities across the United States.

Despite the Department of Defense's directive against deploying service members who are not "medically able to accomplish their duties in deployed environments," these troops are being sent back into combat with shocking regularity. Troops return home with multiple accumulated traumas. In these cases, the odds of suicide attempts increase dramatically, as do the odds of drug and alcohol abuse, divorce, depression and various kinds of out-of-control behavior.

None of this is news to the folks at Fort Hood. Last spring, three military spouses desperate to help their husbands were driven to public action. Their husbands were all already diagnosed with PTSD. Their command was ignoring their conditions and failing to treat them in accordance with the directives of their military medical profiles. The profiles stated that these men were not to be exposed to weapons, war training, or war simulation of any kind. yet in direct contravention of those instructions, they were sent to National Training Center (NTC) for simulated war training.

With the help and support of folks, such as Cindy Thomas, the founder and manager of Under the Hood Café and Outreach Center (the GI coffee house located in Killeen outside Ft. Hood), the women faced down military pressure and ultimately secured proper care for their husbands. Cindy herself was experienced and ready to help: her soon-to-be former husband of eighteen years was diagnosed with TBI and PTSD after serving multiple deployments. Their marriage was happy and stable before collapsing under the weight of military trauma.

Aaron Hughes, a field organizer for IVAW out of Chicago is one of the folks getting the pledges signed outside the PX; both he and Cindy Thomas took part in an IVAW/Civilian-Soldier Alliance campaign development retreat in June 2010. This event occurred right in the middle of the struggle between the spouses and their husbands' commanders, and Cindy shared that story, as well as others collected from the many active duty soldiers and family members she supports at the Cafe.

That testimony helped to develop the campaign. Now, seven months later, the campaign has found its legs and returned to Ft. Hood. "We need to listen to the stories of those who are on the ground and let them guide us," Aaron Hughes argues, "This isn't about rhetoric. This is about treating our troops like human beings with the right to heal."

This is a different way of approaching the issue of ending the wars, through clear-eyed solidarity with those most impacted by trauma, the ones who are expected to fight these wars, along with the people whose countries are being occupied by these troops. "And," he adds, "we have collected over 100 pledges already and are going for 400 before the week is out."

Iraq Veterans Against the War, along other veterans and active duty service members, is taking the campaign to the soldiers at Ft. Hood and on to bases across the country. Those outside of the military need to listen hard to the stories being told and consider what it really means to support the troops. Support them in stopping the Deployment of Traumatized Troops.

SIRI MARGERIN IS A MEMBER OF THE CIVILIAN-SOLDIER ALLIANCE.

Killeen, Texas

Navigating the Aftermath

Luke Wilcox

"It's not clear how much time passed. Perhaps it was only a handful of minutes. Suddenly, she awoke to a burst of pain. Sitting squarely on top of her legs was a shell bomb. Shock and horror. Crushing weight. Loss of consciousness. An errant US shell had crashed through her bedroom wall and landed on top of her as she slept in bed. It did not detonate. If it had, this would be a different story. There would be nothing left to speak of." – Excerpt from *Zainab Jawhar*, a book by Clare Beer, Monica Haller, and Zainab Jawhar appearing in the exhibit, Navigating the Aftermath.

Navigating the Aftermath is an art exhibit and campaign that creates a shared space for Iraqis and Americans to speak about the ongoing war in Iraq and its consequences.

Organized by the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP), *Navigating the Aftermath* opened on February 18 at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. From June to October, it will tour with the film, *The Unreturned* (a documentary film following five Iraqi refugee families), to six towns in Minnesota: Duluth, Ely, Mankato, Bemidji, St. Cloud, and Winona.

In *Navigating the Aftermath*, Iraqi and American artists (including veterans) explore the effects of the ongoing Iraq War on our two countries. Artists look at the war through the lens of their personal experiences. In their individual works and in their dialogue, they interface with the tragedy of the ongoing war.

The show's curator, Tricia Khutoretsky, says, "From the American perspective, the artists are veterans, friends and family of soldiers, or those closely tied to the war through activism. As the artists' battle with ignored and misunderstood experiences, with sharing them to try to make sense of them, their voices speak of lives changed and lives taken in a place called Iraq. Joining the American artists are not only artists living in Iraq, but Iraqi-Americans who have left the place they once called home. The artists represent the voice of a contemporary and modern Iraq, hopeful and invested in the future of their country. They confront their losses and the path ahead searching for meaning and a new understanding of the identity of an Iraqi and the identity of his or her country."

One participating artist, Monica Haller, tells the story of Zainab Jawhar, an Iraqi woman who lost her legs to an American missile in 2004. The Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, along with its partner in Iraq the Muslim Peacemaker Teams and local partners in Minneapolis, brought Zainab to Minneapolis in the fall of 2010 to receive prosthetic limbs and physical therapy, free of charge. Haller, who performed an installation piece of Zainab's words in the exhibit gallery, asks, "How do I transmit this? How do I witness this? How do I understand her reality, her disability? (the cause of which I have ownership). I am trying to meditate on these tasks. Trying to find a tool for the job."

The artists whose work is exhibited in *Navigating the Aftermath* have the opportunity to present to their audiences unfiltered perspectives on the Iraq War. While the exhibit does not represent one holistic point of view, it challenges all participants to examine their assumptions about Iraq, US veterans, refugees, displacement, and international migration.

Participating artists include Jesse Albrecht, Ayad Alkadhi, Susu Attar, Camille Gage, Sundus Abdul Hadi, Monica Haller, Aaron Hughes, Jim Lommasson, Reben Majeed, Aaron McLeod, Jamal Penjweny, Megan Rye, and Jane Powers.

One artist writes that her work in the exhibit intends "to visually return the war to the forefront – to portray a communal sense of loss, ambiguity, and sorrow." As Americans, we must begin to live honestly with that loss and sorrow, repair our relationship with Iraqis, and reform the cultural and political systems that enabled the Iraq War.

From *Zainab Jawhar*: "The reality is that she did not get a set of 'new legs,' but rather a set of new prostheses which are artificial and, therefore, second best. Even American-made prostheses cannot buy a free pass to her old life. The accident and its handicapping consequences will never be erased. In her country especially, Zainab is another hapless casualty of war. Currently, there is no system that gives value to the tens of thousands of men, women and children who have been injured, maimed and disabled. Though Zainab may now be able to walk the length of a classroom unassisted, she cannot change the home she returns to and the problems that persist there: political instability, a limping economy, and a society that cloisters its handicapped."

For more information on *Navigating the Aftermath*, visit navigatingtheaftermath.org. For more information on the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project, visit reconciliationproject.org.

To order a copy of *Zainab Jawhar*, visit bit.ly/ePi8zp.

Luke Wilcox is the Development and Communications Director at the Iraqi and American Reconciliation Project (IARP). He holds an MA in International Relations with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa from Boston University and speaks Arabic. He was a Katherine Davis Fellow for Peace in 2011.

Syrian Government Fires on Unarmed Crowds

A Plea For Our Soldiers

Unless one has been in it, no one can understand what war is like. When all sense of reality disappears, everything takes on nightmarish proportions. Colors become undiscernible to the eyes. Sounds fade into the distance. Time and movement slows. You can't direct your thoughts. All is like unto a dream. Everything is gray – all that is but the color of blood. All is unreal except the cries of pain and dying. In the mayhem and confusion, shouts and explosions penetrate your brain in random array. You make no sense of what you see or hear. Every movement becomes action or reaction. There's no order, no thought behind any action. Pure reflex. Fundamental manhood, kill or be killed. You fight, you survive.

Later, this brought on the nightmares. Those nightmares of mine aren't just visions or ghosts. When they come, they are the reality of life. Once, hardly a night went by, when one didn't relive the pain and hurt of the nightmare. Even now, when they come, the pain, the hurt, the loss, are all too real.

Mayhap you come in contact with one of these brave souls coming back from war, perhaps this will help you to understand somewhat of what they have been through and it will help you to be able to help them in some way. War may affect some differently, but it does affect all it touches. Please, don't forget these, who have answered the call of their nation. My generation's wars were the dirty little wars: Southeast Asia, Africa, South/Central Americas, the Middle East. No one wanted to remember these, or those who fought in them. We were cast aside, to be forgotten. Often reviled for being there and surviving. Don't let this happen to these who have served their country. Remember them and be there for them.

—Donald D. Wood
Graceville Correctional Facility
Graceville, Florida

VVAW led the way in a solidarity march in Salt Lake City, Utah on March 19th, Utah. Vietnam vet Lewis Downey (left) holds the banner as Larry Chadwick shoots the bull with Ron Ashby in wheelchair. Also attending was member Rick Miller. VVAW member Aaron Davis spoke at the rally after the march. Photo by Aaron Davis.

Where We Came from,Who We Are,Who Can Join

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc. (VVAW) is a national veterans' organization that was founded in New York City in 1967 after six Vietnam vets marched together in a peace demonstration. It was organized to voice the growing opposition among returning servicemen and women to the still-raging war in Indochina, and grew rapidly to a membership of over 30,000 throughout the United States, including active duty GIs stationed in Vietnam. Through ongoing actions and grassroots organization, VVAW exposed the ugly truth about US involvement in Southeast Asia and our first-hand experiences helped many other Americans to see the unjust nature of that war.

VVAW also took up the struggle for the rights and needs of veterans. In 1970, we began the first rap groups to deal with traumatic aftereffects of war, setting the example for readjustment counseling at vet centers today. We exposed the shameful neglect of many disabled vets in VA hospitals and helped draft legislation to improve educational benefits and create job programs. VVAW fought for amnesty for war resisters, including vets with bad discharges. We helped make known the negative health effects of exposure to chemical defoliants and the VA's attempts to cover up these conditions as well as their continued refusal to provide treatment and compensation for many Agent Orange victims.

Today our government still finances and arms undemocratic and repressive regimes around the world in the name of "democracy." American troops have again been sent into open battle in the Middle East and covert actions in Latin America, for many of the same misguided reasons that were used to send us to Southeast Asia. Meanwhile, many veterans from all eras are still denied justice—facing unemployment, discrimination, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder and other health problems, while already inadequate services are cut back or eliminated.

We believe that service to our country and communities did not end when we were discharged. We remain committed to the struggle for peace and for social and economic justice for all people. We will continue to oppose senseless military adventures and to teach the real lessons of the Vietnam War. We will do all we can to prevent future generations from being put through a similar tragedy, and we will continue to demand dignity and respect for veterans of all eras. This is real patriotism and we remain true to our mission. Anyone who supports this overall effort, whether Vietnam veteran or not, veteran or not, may join us in this long-term struggle. JOIN US!

Insignia of Vietnam Veterans Against the War

We took the MACV patch as our own, replacing the sword with the upside-down rifle with helmet, the international symbol of soldiers killed in action. This was done to expose the lies and hypocrisy of US aggression in Vietnam as well as its cost in human lives. The original MACV insignia also put forward lies. The US military was not protecting (the sword) the Vietnamese from invasion from the People's Republic of China (the China Gates), but was instead trying to "save" Vietnam from itself.

Our insignia has come to represent veterans fighting against new "adventures" like the Vietnam War, while at the same time fighting for a decent way of life for veterans and their families.

Our insignia is more than 30 years old. It belongs to VVAW, and no other organization or group may use it for any reason without permission.

Beware of VVAW AI

This notice is to alert you to a handful of individuals calling themselves the "Vietnam Veterans Against the War Anti-Imperialist" (VVAW-AI). VVAW-AI is actually the creation of an obscure ultraleft sect, designed to confuse people in order to associate themselves with VVAW's many years of activism and struggle. They are not a faction, caucus or part of VVAW, Inc. and are not affiliated with us in any way. We urge all people and organizations to beware of this bogus outfit.

SUPPORT VVAW!
DONATE OR JOIN TODAY!

Vietnam Veterans Against the War, Inc.
VVAW Membership
P.O. Box 2065, Station A
Champaign, IL 61825-2065

Membership Application

- Name _____
- Address _____
- City _____ State _____ Zip _____
- Phone _____
- Email address _____
- Branch _____
- Dates of Service (if applicable) _____
- Unit _____
- Military Occupation _____
- Rank _____
- Overseas Duty _____
- Dates _____

☐ Yes, add me to the VVAW email list.
☐ I do not wish to join, but wish to make a donation to the work of VVAW.
☐ Sign me up for a lifetime membership in VVAW. $250 is enclosed.

Membership in VVAW is open to ALL people who want to build a veterans' movement that fights for peace and justice. Most of our members are veterans of the Vietnam era, but we welcome veterans of all eras, as well as family members and friends to our ranks. The annual membership fee is $25.00 (not required of homeless, unemployed or incarcerated vets).

VVAW is a democratic organization. Chapters decide on local programs and projects under the general guidelines of the national program. Chapters elect local leadership and representatives to annual national meetings where major organizational decisions are made and national coordinators elected. These coordinators are responsible for the day-to-day organizational leadership of VVAW and issuing national publications.

Signature _____

Date _____

Total Amount Enclosed _____

Make checks payable to VVAW. Contributions are tax-deductible.

RECOLLECTIONS

VVAW Anti-War Protest, Washington DC 1971

Lee Wengrzyn

My buddy was excited when he told me were going to DC to protest the war. Seattle, Washington is a long way from Washington DC. He told me VVAW was paying for the ticket and we had the chance to tell of our experiences in Nam and try and turn some heads in the Capital. And so we did. I didn't measure the success of our mission to march on the Capital until later when my buddy and I were catching the plane to return home to Seattle. I don't know what influence we had on the decision makers to stop the Vietnam insanity. It was cathartic to march in camouflage around the Capital buildings and streets and to meet with members of Congress. To have a chance to express the folly of war from our personal experiences. It was great to sleep on The Mall and see the support of so many people of everyday America and some pretty famous ones too. We threw our medals over the fence and marched in protest through the streets.

Then, the protest over, we went to the airport to board our plane. As my buddy and I entered the catwalk towards the door of the plane, a man dressed in a suit stepped in front of us. He flashed a badge and ID card that I took to be FBI and told us to step aside to let the other passengers board the plane. He frisked us and wrote down our names from the IDs he demanded of us. I asked him why he was doing this and for what purpose and he, not surprisingly, just glared mute in response. Then he told us to go ahead and board our plane. We did and he followed us on and disappeared somewhere in the back of the plane. This was a non-stop flight back to Seattle.

I told my buddy that we must be pretty important for being a couple of E-3s doing our democratic duty to tell the world of the foolishness of war. I guess we did get our point across enough to worry the powers-that-be. I suppose we are in some database in the bowels of government and I really don't care. Our excitement to tell our stories of Vietnam has long been muted by the continuing absurdity of the endless wars we are now in. It looks like we are a lot of protests away from putting an end to the battle for peace and respect.

Lee Wengrzyn is a member of VVAW who lives in Florida.

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